SHORT STORIES

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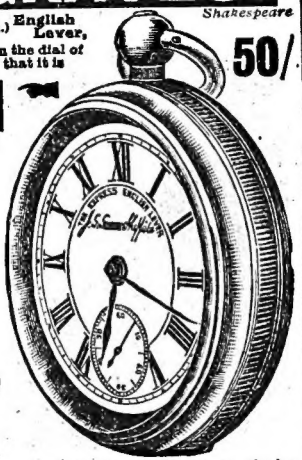

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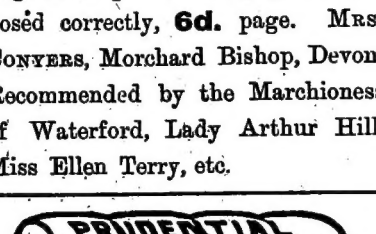

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SHORT STORIES

No. 718.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending October 4th, 1902.

A Fair Maid's Mischief.

"So you refuse me the very first thing I have ever asked you? So much for your speeches and professions. You're distressingly young, Jim —and not clever."

"I'm not so stupid that I can't see it's not the thing for you to have this fellow hanging about you."

"Pooh! when did I consider etiquette? Besides, it's my own business."

"May be. It won't be mine to take your message."

"Beware of jealousy, my lord, it is——"

"Jealous? Not I. Do you think I'd be jealous of a nigger? Not if he were fifty times a prince."

"Do try to hide your ignorance, Jim. Prince Osma is as little like a nigger as you are to a gentlemen—when you go on in this ridiculous fashion. Such nonsense; why he's the son of a Rajah, and, as you know, has been educated at Oxford."

"I won't quarrel over terms, Gladys. You may consider him white, if you prefer; to me he will always be a nigger, and a black one at that."

"All the same, Jim, dear, I'm sure you will give him my message, and tell him I have something particular to say."

"I'm—I'm hanged if I do."

"Ah, but I want you to, and you're such a nice boy, Jim, quite the nicest boy I know. Give me your reason—your true reason why you won't?"

The boy flushed and raised his eyes to hers.

"Well, then," he said doggedly, "I don't think it's treating Edward squarely. You ought not to go sitting out dances and that sort of thing with other fellows when he's not there, and as to the Prince, I believe Ted would knock him down if he found him in the conservatory with you."

"But I'm sitting out with you, Jim dear?"

The little white hand that had been lazily fluttering a huge red fan, crept up the boy's sleeve till it rested on his shoulder.

"Oh, Ted knows all about me. I don't count. In fact, he relies on me to keep you out of mischief."

"Really?"

The boy shot a glance at the fair face resting against the silken cushions.

"He knows I'd give my life for you, Gladys," he said slowly.

She shook her head.

"Sounds pretty," she murmured sweetly, "but it isn't real."

"Test me."

"Take my message, my message to Prince Osma." Her voice was still soft but the eyes flashed, and the pale cheeks were tinged with red.

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"Do you really mean it, Gladys? Is it really important, or only one of your freaks?"

"Jim!" she started to her feet. "It's terribly important. Fail me, and I don't know what I shall do."

"But what does it mean? Has the fellow dared to annoy you? Has——"

"Don't ask me, Jim, don't ask me. Only if you care for me, go at once."

Her slim figure was drawn to its full height and she pointed to the door with a gesture half imploring, half commanding.

But he still hesitated—and the time was going fast.

For a moment they faced each other, then with a catch in her voice, but with her eyes bright, she leant against him.

"Will you go, Jim—will you go?"

And while the answer trembled on his lips she stopped them with her own.

"*Now* will you do as I ask?"

And, man-like, he consented.

A moment later he was regretting his own weakness. Who was this Indian chappie? he reflected, and what did this mystery mean? Besides——but he had promised, and to promise, with Jim Carton, was to perform.

He managed to deliver the message he had been charged with into the Prince's ear alone. Then, filled with a vague idea of keeping his cousin's name from the tender mercies of the scandalous, he fell to pacing to and fro the passage, with a dogged sort of persistence eminently characteristic.

To Gladys it seemed ages before the Prince arrived, and yet when the door opened she wished, how ardently, that the delay had been longer.

"You have sent for me?" Despite a certain duskiness of skin Osma was an imposing, even a handsome figure. His air of distinction marked him out no less than the pale olive skin and the brilliant eyes.

"Yes," she answered quietly, "I have something of importance to say."

"Everything you say is of importance—to me," he answered, and raising her small white fingers to his lips, bent low his head.

The girl trembled under the gaze of those passionate eyes, and something in her own made the Prince draw back. Next instant she was speaking quickly, with emphasis.

"I sent to tell you that, that——" She flung out her hands—"I am engaged," she panted, "engaged to be married."

"Since when?"

She wished he would look anywhere rather than at her;

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that she could feel contempt, hatred for him, anything rather than as she did—like a culprit detected in a peculiarly despicable crime.

"I was engaged when I met you last year. I know I have treated you badly—behaved shamefully, in fact; but"—here she raised her eyes pleadingly, only to let them fall before the intent look in his—"you will forgive me, and forget."

"Forget? It is impossible."

"But——"

He stopped her impatiently.

"It was not without a struggle that I allowed myself to love you. There were reasons why it would have been better that I should not take an English girl for my wife. But I could not resist. Gradually you dominated my thoughts, my will, my life, until all that was worth living and striving for, was you. You knew this; you cannot look at me and deny it. True, I did not ask you in so many words to marry me. But—you understood. You read my heart and knew that when the time came I should ask you to be mine."

"I have no excuse to make," she said piteously.

"Ah, but you loved me also. This engagement that you speak of is some family affair arranged by your relations. You tell me of it in obedience to their commands. You do not love this man?"

For a moment words failed her, then she said simply, "I love him with all my heart. Edward Vaughan and I were engaged three years ago, but last year we quarrelled. He went to India to shoot big game and find distraction. Being a woman I had to stay at home, and—" Her eyes finished the sentence. She had found distraction in Osma's conquest.

"And this man whom you love, and who showed his love for you by going away to India, has he returned?"

"He is expected every day."

"But perhaps he would not be anxious to renew the engagement?"

Her eyes flashed at the sneer, but with an effort she controlled herself.

"We are already reconciled," she answered.

"And you imagine that you will marry him—this man?"

Her hand went to her side with a gesture of pain. Truly she was paying a high price for her vanity.

"Will you not be a little merciful?" she said piteously. "I know I have acted meanly, wickedly towards you. But I am sorry, very sorry; surely I can say no more."

"You can say more, much more than that. You can say, as I mean you to, that it is not him nor any other that you love, but me."

"This must end," she said firmly. "I have told you how deeply I regret any pain that I have caused you. I can only once again ask your forgiveness and bid you farewell."

She gave him her hand as she spoke—a slight fair figure in her draperies of shimmering white.

For a moment he hesitated. She thought the game was hers, and smiled in the slow, sweet fashion that he remembered all too well. She was so lovely, it was impossible that he could leave her—resign her to another.

"Farewell," she murmured softly.

"Never," he answered fiercely. "I will hold you against all the world. Of your free will if you are wise. If not—against it."

She was powerless to stem the torrent, her words were impotent to check the passion and despair which overwhelmed him.

"Be warned," he cried at last, "be warned. If not mine, you shall never be another's. I will kill him first—you after."

"Coward!" she cried. "Coward!"

But in a moment he had his arms about her, calling her strange love names in a curious tongue, kissing the fair head that rested all unwillingly upon his shoulder.

She could hear Jim's voice in the passage. "Gladys, Gladys, Edward's come." But she was powerless to reply. The room seemed filled with a thick cloud, through which a pair of dark eyes glowed, holding her own in bondage.

"Go," she murmured hoarsely. "In Heaven's name *go!*"

The voices were coming nearer, her uncle's voice and Jim's.

"For pity's sake," she cried, and strove to free herself. Then, with a woman's cunning she simulated yielding.

"Leave me," she said, "and I will see you again to-morrow evening."

"Give me a token," was the answer, and shuddering she let him kiss her face.

"Jim," she cried, as her cousin's boyish face appeared, "Jim, I'm —I'm tired. You must tell Edward that I'll see him in the morning. I can't meet him to-night. Promise, promise you won't let him know of Osma."

The boy nodded. "Is he annoying you in any way?" he asked, jerking in the direction of the Prince. "Because if so, I'll give the governor a hint to bring his visit to a close."

"Don't ask me anything to-night, dear. I'm ill; I'm tired, and I wish—I wish I were as old as Methuselah!"

With which astounding statement Gladys went upstairs to bed.

Next morning Gladys gave herself up to the happiness of conciliation with Edward—Ted as she loved to call him.

"Why did you behave so badly, Gladys?" he asked, stroking her hair. "It would have been as easy to say you were sorry a year ago as now. And you did flirt with Charlie Carew, you can't deny it."

"Only a little," she whispered penitently. "But I've turned over a new leaf now, Ted. I'm never going to flirt any more."

"After all, I was to blame. I might have known you only acted as you did in pique. But there's something—to me, so utterly ignoble in the idea of a woman encouraging a man to love her when all the time she means nothing. It is little to her; a tribute to her vanity; an hour or two's amusement; but to him it is often a hard and bitter experience."

The girl trembled a little and hid her face upon his shoulder. She had been within an ace of telling him about Osma, but now it was impossible. She dared not face the possibility of his scorn, contempt, more than all the possibility that she might lose his love. She nestled closer to his side; how she worshipped, adored him! She, the woman who had played with hearts so often and so cruelly, at last had lost her own.

The day passed all too quickly and with a little shiver of apprehension Gladys remembered her promise to see Osma.

"I must go now, dear," she told Vaughan. "It's time to dress for dinner, and I want to make myself look beautiful for you."

As she passed up the stairs a low voice called her.

"When shall I see you, Lady Gladys?"

She stumbled, nearly falling, in her agitation.

"In half an hour, in the library," she whispered.

Fear suggested that Ted might have heard, and almost losing courage, she tapped at Jim's door.

"Will you be down by seven, dear?" she asked. "I want you to keep guard for me while I see Osma."

Jim came out and stood by her on the landing.

"Will this be the last time, Gladys?" he asked gravely.

"The last," she answered.

"At all costs keep Ted away," she implored some half hour later. "Oh, Jim, you are very good to me."

The boy's eyes followed her tall, slim figure longingly. He worshipped his cousin, did this seventeen-year-old Jim, and

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to his mind only one man in the world was worthy to possess her." And that man was Edward Vaughan.

"I can't stay long," Gladys commenced hurriedly, as she entered the library; "as it is I've had to fly over dressing, and my bracelets are not properly fastened."

She moved near the window as she spoke, and the sun caught her hair, and seemed to wrap her in a golden veil. She was gloriously, mercilessly beautiful in her gown of creamy satin, caught here and there with jewels, that shimmered with every movement of her long, lithe limbs.

"May I help you?"

Osma's voice was soft; his manner, as usual, quiet and self-restrained. Surely she could bend him to her will. With a charming gesture she held out her soft white arm.

"You won't hurt me?" she asked.

"Never—how could I?"

"Do you mean it—do you really mean you have no wish to harm me?"

He bowed still lower over her hand.

"What do you wish?" he said calmly.

"That you will forgive my thoughtless, unkind treatment and forget me."

"The first—yes. The second—never."

"You—you——"

"I was wrong," he said slowly. "Yesterday I spoke in the heat of passion. To-day I see things in the light of reason. Vaughan loves you. Vaughan shall marry you. I swear it," he added, with a sudden emphasis. "You shall not be cheated of your happiness."

"How can I thank you for your generosity?"

"Tell me one thing," he answered. "Had there"—he hesitated—"had there been no Vaughan, could you have found happiness with me?"

"Had I never met Edward," she answered, "I might perhaps have grown to care for you."

"Thank you," he said, raising her hand to his lips. A moment later Gladys was alone. "Thank Heaven, that's over," she murmured. "Jim," as her cousin entered, "here is the end of my last flirtation. Osma has behaved beautifully."

In any case the Prince took his defeat with unexpected good humour. He even congratulated Vaughan with well-feigned heartiness, gracefully complimented Gladys' uncle on the match, and won every lady's good opinion.

"I'm really quite sorry to lose him," Lady Fairfax exclaimed. "But he insists he goes to-morrow. Some wretched business or other compels him."

Jim did not share the general regret at Osma's departure. That young man had his own views on the subject of niggers, and opined that it would be a good thing when the Prince cleared out.

"I believe the beggar's hatching some mischief or other," he thought, watching the dark face with its passionate eyes. "I don't like the way he looks at Gladys—By the bye, Prince"—he turned to Osma—"there's a parcel just come for you. At least a sort of packing-case arrangement. It's in the hall—will you go down and inspect it?"

"It contains some curios from India," answered Osma. "I have been expecting them. They will, I think, interest you"—he bowed to Lady Fairfax—"with your permission I will unpack the case and show you the contents."

"I should like nothing better," said the lady. "India is such a wonderful place. It always makes me think of idols with big diamond eyes. Are there any idols in your case, Prince?"

"I fear nothing so interesting; a few trifles merely."

The case was brought upstairs and Osma deftly opened it.

Some beautiful specimens of Indian embroidery, and curiously carved ivories were handed round, examined and enthused upon. Then came bangles in gold, silver and copper. Lastly Osma produced a box of sandal wood.

"The inhabitants of a certain province in my country," he commenced, "have a curious custom of testing whether ill-luck or good is likely to attend an enterprise. They take a dart—a thin arrow-shaped piece of wood about eight inches long, sharpened to a point and aim it at a shield of parchment. On the shield they write the name of the place where they wish to go, or a malady they fear. The name of their beloved, or their enemy. They aim the dart at the name on the parchment. If, so the story goes, the dart enters the parchment, fortune is favourable to the thrower. If, on the contrary, the dart glances off the surface of the shield, and falls to the ground, luck is against him. I have here"—he opened the box of sandal wood—"a few of these darts. It might, I thought, be amusing if some of us were to try to work the oracle for ourselves. There are some six darts here—a piece of cardboard would, I think, take the place of the shield."

"What a *sweet* idea!" chirped Lady Fairfax.

"Too lovely!" said a dear young thing in blue.

"Beats fortune-telling all to fits," remarked a go-ahead young woman.

Altogether the suggestion was rapturously received. A stout piece of cardboard was formed into a sort of shield, and Gladys, as the most intrepid of the company, was selected as the first to try her luck.

"I think perhaps if someone held the shield it would be better. The darts are only wooden, not in the least likely to hurt anybody even if they do miss the mark. What do you think, Vaughan?" and Prince Osma smiled.

"Certainly. By all means. Gladys, I'll be your shield bearer. Let fly your dart at me and see if fortune speeds it." Laughing he grasped the pasteboard and posed some few yards distant.

Gladys scrawled something on a piece of paper and fixed it on the shield.

"What have you written, Gladys?" asked Jim inquisitively. "Oh! Ted, of course. Well, if there's any truth in the tale your dart ought to go right home."

And so it did; the little weapon flew straight as an arrow from Gladys to the shield, entering the cardboard with a twang.

"Again, Lady Gladys. Three is the mystic number, you know."

She laughed and pinned another name in place of Ted's. The name was that of Osma. Jim read and frowned.

Once more Gladys let fly. This time the dart fell short, and dropped inert upon the floor.

"Bad luck," said Osma; stooping he picked the weapon up and handed it to her.

Gladys smiled a little uneasily. It was all nonsense, of course. Yet it was strange. She still half-feared the Prince. According to the legend the dart had told her she had cause.

"Good luck to Jim," she cried and hurled the dart. It touched the shield, then fell limp as the other.

"My dear Gladys, don't tell me I'm to be the victim of misfortune," laughed her cousin, "for I shan't believe you. Here, Ted, you have a try."

Vaughan was succeeded by the girl in blue, who quickly gave place to another of the party. Lady Fairfax screamed in horror when the oracle declared her pet pug was in danger, but otherwise was quite content with the performance.

"Now, Osma, it's *your* turn. We are all anxious to hear your luck."

Osma bowed gracefully and quickly threw a dart.

"Myself," he called, and everybody clapped as the dart went home. "Lady Gladys," fresh applause and equal success.

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"Mr. Vaughan." The Prince stepped back and took a fresh dart from the box. "I want to make sure this time," he said. "Vaughan's too good a fellow for luck to miss him." He poised the weapon, Ted holding the shield laughed encouragement. A moment later the dart was flying through the air. It struck Jim that Osma had aimed too high, as though the mark was not the shield but Ted himself. Acting on a sudden impulse prompted by a strange indefinable sense of fear, Jim pushed Vaughan to one side, and instinctively put up his own hand. It was done so quickly that Ted himself was hardly aware what had happened. The next moment there was a general outcry; the dart was sticking in Jim's hand!

"Poor Jim," said Gladys, "your ill-luck has overtaken you. Let me pull it out."

"Allow me." Osma gently moved her aside.

"I can never apologise sufficiently," he said to Jim. He spoke huskily, and his dusky face looked curiously grey.

"It was my own fault," said Jim. "You weren't a bit to blame." But when on removing the dart it was found to be, unlike the others, fitted with a small steel point, Jim did not feel so sure that Osma was so innocent as he had stated.

It would be to Osma's advantage, or he would think so, if Ted Vaughan were out of the way. The Prince regarded him as a rival. "Niggers," reflected Jim, "weren't particular how they got rid of such. It was quite in the nature of a nigger to have planned the whole thing, and to have arranged to throw this very dart at Ted."

Altogether the business had a very ugly look. Jim decided he would confide his suspicions to Vaughan the next day. He wouldn't speak to-night, he felt horribly done up, and the scratch on his hand—the dart had entered the extreme tip of his third finger—was getting uncomfortable.

It was ridiculous to think a mere scratch like that could hurt a fellow so. Still it did hurt. He took a stiff brandy and soda and got off to bed.

He was awakened by a stinging pain in his right hand. The third finger was numb, from its base sharp agonising thrills shot up to his shoulder.

As he groaned, he heard a quick sharp sigh. Someone was in the room. "Who's there?" he called.

"'Tis I, Osma. I want to talk to you."

The Prince struck a match, lit the gas and locked the door. Then he crossed over to the bed and sat down by Jim's side.

"I have something to tell you," he said. "Promise me before I speak that you will hear what I have to say in silence. You will not cry out, make a disturbance, noise or alarm."

"All right, I promise. What is it?"

Osma leant over him and spoke in a quiet soft voice.

"The dart I threw at you was poisoned. In two hours you will die."

"Die!" Jim sat up dazed. Then as the meaning of the words came home to him he started out of bed and threw himself upon the Prince.

"You dog! you scoundrel! If I die it won't be till I have killed you!"

"Your promise, remember your promise," said Osma, forcing him back upon the bed. "There is still much to hear. I did not mean to hurt *you*. It was Vaughan I wanted to kill. I planned it all, no one would have known, the poison cannot be detected. He would have been removed from my path."

"Why do you tell me this," gasped Jim. "What good does it do now? Call somebody, fetch my mother, send for a doctor. I'm not going to give in without a fight."

Osma shook his head. "There is only one way you may be saved," he said.

"And that?"

"Wait. There is yet time. Tell me first why did you push Vaughan back? Did you feel any fear that I meant mischief to him?"

"Yes, I did. I always knew you had your knife in him and I wasn't going to let old Ted take any chances."

"But why should you suffer in his stead? That is what I cannot understand. You love Gladys also, I have seen it. If Vaughan were killed there might have been a chance for you."

"A chance no decent man would take. You fool, don't you see, it was because I love her I wanted to save her from unhappiness. For her sake, I would lay down my life. For her sake, I took the chance instead of Ted."

"Ah," The Prince drew a long deep breath. "You are a strange people," he said slowly. "Tell me, would it grieve her very much to lose you?"

"She'd be sorry, very. Gladys has been chums with me all my life."

"Then I give her that life. I also will make sacrifices to my love. Quick, throw on your clothes; come, follow me."

Urged by his voice and gesture, mastered by his impetuous will Jim obeyed and followed Osma from the room, down the stairs out to the stables. The dogcart stood ready, Osma's black servant at the side.

"Quick, it's a race for life. Another half hour and it is too late. I am taking you to a doctor that I know. If we are in time you will be saved. If not——" Osma closed his lips significantly, and furiously lashed the horse.

"Don't forget that this means ruin for me," he said hoarsely. "I shall have to tell the truth—and then"—he shrugged his shoulders.

Jim made no answer.

The horse had fallen into a swift and steady stride. They flew along the country road, past hedges, white in the summer moon, past homestead, cottage and farm, up hill and through the valley, a wild, mad race, the mare's hoofs clicking, the wheels skidding on the road.

"At last!" The Prince drew up at a small white house. Throwing the reins to his servant, he clutched Jim, dazed and sick with pain and terror, and dragged him to the door. A peal of the bell, a hurried parley from the window. Five minutes later Jim was in the surgery.

"You understand," he heard Osma say, "the poison is most virulent, amputation is his only chance. Otherwise"—he glanced significantly at Jim's white face. "The wound is from a poisoned dart. I——"

Jim feebly interrupted him.

"I was playing the fool with the confounded thing," he said in a faint, weak voice. "Pure accident—no one to blame." His voice died away. He fell fainting.

* * * * * *

When Jim reappeared, some few weeks later, in Society he found himself the centre of attraction. The story of his race for life had leaked out, and had created an immense sensation. In default of Prince Osma, who had suddenly returned to India, Jim found himself the hero of the situation. He had to tell the story twenty times a day.

"Poisoned dart, don't you know, got mixed up with the others. Stuck it in my fingers. Osma, like a good chap, hauled me to the doctor. Saved my life? Rather, but I lost my hand."

This was the only explanation that Jim ever gave, even to Vaughan. But the latter had his own suspicions, and a wonder and reverence tinged his friendship for the boy.

Some few months after Ted and Gladys were made man and wife, the news reached them of Prince Osma's death. He had been killed tiger-shooting in the jungle.

"I'm sorry," Gladys said to Jim, with a little shudder, "but I was horribly afraid of him."

"He was not such a bad chap," answered the boy. "Consider, Gladys, he had some excuse." They were alone at the moment, Ted had gone into the garden.

"He had. Oh! Jim, it might have been much worse." She lifted his maimed arm gently. "I guessed about *this* long ago. I can never, never thank you."

Jim laughed. "It's all right, dear," he said, "the loss of a hand does not make *all* the difference."

She clung to him tearful and penitent.

"Think," she said softly, "what might have happened if——"

"We won't think of it. Sufficient to the day are the consequences even of your mischief. Though," he sighed, "you're still mischievous, you know."

She shook her head. "Never again," she said, "never again."

But at that Jim gave a smile.

John K. Prothero.

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Caught in the Act.

The Story of a Burglar's Adventure.

I HAD all but done the trick when suddenly the room was illuminated by a brilliant flood of electric light. So unexpectedly it came and so dazzlingly, that I was struck all of a heap, as it were, and stood stupidly caught in the very act, with one hand lingering over my booty and the other raised instinctively to shield eyes and face from the blinding glare.

A pretty position for a professional burglar. Taken completely at a disadvantage, like any greenhorn. Held up, as you might say, at the very psychological moment and by a girl—the prettiest creature, I swear, that ever donned lace and cambric for the distraction of mankind.

She sat up in bed, a symphony in white, all be-laced and be-ribboned, and confronted me, bending upon me two eyes as blue as twin sapphires, in which were neither alarm nor supplication, but satisfaction only—satisfaction complete and apparently long-anticipated.

The loveliest hand in the world, white as the lawn that fell back kindly to reveal it, and moulded like that of the Medicean Venus, held, as if well-accustomed to it, a silver-mounted revolver—a toy, yet unmistakably a weapon; a trinket such as a dainty woman might hang at her chatelaine, but still sufficiently convincing to hold me planted there deprived of any inclination to run the risk of testing its mettle.

"Well," said my apprehender, in a voice that betrayed no more emotion than did her lovely face, which was so intoned as to set my susceptible heart beating, "at last I've got you! Now, drop into that chair if you please. No, keep your hands in front of you, if you don't mind. Yes, so; and let me talk to you. Good gracious! But I'm in luck! To think of my getting hold of a burglar at last!"

Her charming features beamed with delight. She even smiled, revealing a double row of the whitest, dearest little teeth it is possible to imagine. Still keeping the muzzle of the little pistol levelled straight at me with a hand that never trembled, with the other she reached down to the foot of the bed and drew up a delicate woollen wrap of pale blue, which she flung deftly about her shoulders. After which she raised the pillows at her back so that they should support her in an upright position and sank back upon them with a luxurious air of establishing herself in comfort. It was evident from look, tone, and gesture that the situation was exceedingly agreeable to her and that she was bent upon enjoying it to the utmost.

"Now," she commanded, with a nod in my direction, "tell me about yourself. All my life I've longed to hear something of a burglar's history from his own lips. Pardon me, but would you very much mind removing your mask? It is only anticipating matters a little, you know. The police will do it anyhow when they come in."

"The police!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

She nodded.

"Yes; they're all over the place, you know. Or perhaps you didn't know that we were warned of your coming? One of their confidence-men (stool pigeons, I think they call them) discovered your intentions and divulged them."

"Confound it!" I ejaculated beneath my breath. "That skunk of a Boynton!"

The girl leant forward earnestly, it seemed to me almost solicitously.

"What did you trust him for?" she said, with a note of reproof in her voice.

"Heaven only knows," I replied, in fierce self-condemnation. "But he'll pay for it yet. Just let him wait till I get my grip on him——"

My fair captor interrupted with a mocking laugh.

"He'll have to wait a long time, I expect," she remarked. "I shouldn't wonder if you get about five years for this. Shouldn't you consider that would be about it?"

I regarded her anxiously through the eye-holes in my mask.

"So you mean to give me up, then?" I hazarded.

She returned my scrutiny with a look of humorous surprise.

"What had you supposed I meant to do with you?" she asked. "Wear you on my watch-chain as a curiosity, or fill your pockets with those trinkets, which appear to have caught your fancy, and show you a safe and sure way of making off with them?"

"I don't know," said I, gloomily, for I really appeared to be in rather a bad hole. "Women sometimes have tender hearts. Beauty and youth have often shown themselves generous and merciful to the unfortunate——" I broke off doubtfully.

The gleam of humour in her eyes deepened.

"Yes," she remarked, "the female heart might well be moved to pity a man in your embarrassing position. Are you, perhaps, an orphan? And is your present condition solely the result of the evil influence to which you have been exposed since early youth?"

I shook my head, entering into her mood. The girl was certainly a character, and I lost sight of my own danger for the moment in enjoyment of her raillery.

"No," I replied, "I cannot plead such extenuating circumstances even for the sake of saving my own skin. Thief though I am, the spirit of truth pervades my breast. Alas, I was born in a respectable street, and of respectable parents. Religion (of a kind) has ever been instilled into my mind, and I have more doctrines at my fingers' ends than I well know what to do with."

Her merry look changed to one of profoundest commiseration.

"Ah, poor man!" she exclaimed. "No wonder you have been driven to irregular courses with such incentives to crime. Now, would you mind removing your mask, I am consumed with curiosity as to your looks. But wait a moment, I feel quite nervous over the event. You see I've been anticipating this moment for years. I've formed a dozen pictures of you in my mind, and do so hope you won't disappoint me. Tell me first, are you good-looking?"

She paused, regarding me with most flattering interest. Certainly she was the most original creature under the sun. Moment by moment she bewitched me more and more.

"On the honour of a house-breaker, an Adonis," I answered, immensely amused.

A troubled expression crept over her face.

"Hm—m," she mused, half aloud. I don't think you should be. It's rather upsetting, don't you know. I didn't look for it at all. Aren't you in the least ruffianly-looking?"

"Not in the least," I said with conviction.

She looked quite dissatisfied.

"Perhaps you are not a competent judge," she suggested hopefully.

"I have perfect confidence in my own discernment," said I firmly. "But since you doubt me, pray permit me to——" I raised my hand to the mask, but she cried out loud and sharp.

"No, no; you are not to move your hands, you know. It is never allowed."

"Pray, then, my dear young lady, how am I to uncover my face?"

She considered a moment.

"I think," she remarked presently, "that I shall be obliged to do it for you. Please come nearer."

Still with my hands uplifted in the traditional attitude and covered by the small revolver, I advanced to the side of the bed. When I got quite close she reached out a beautiful hand and touched the mask that hid my face. I breathed the perfume of the exquisite flesh, and felt my heart beat in ecstasy at the near proximity of the lovely form. Joy was it to be a burglar, to find one's self detected in crime, to suffer, imprisonment—aye, even death itself, for the delight of feeling that soft hand steal to one's cheek, of drinking deep of the intoxicating beauty of those wonderful violet eyes, of tasting that fragrant breath upon the lips.

One moment—and the fair shapely hand dropped again to its former position, the mask held daintily between its white fingers. Another, and a soft murmur of pleasure and approval escaped the curved, red lips.

My divinity was evidently well-pleased with her capture. She smiled triumphantly. And I—I was completely captured in more senses than one.

But hark, what was that? A noise overhead! With astonishing rapidity, I was transformed from the spellbound lover to the commonplace burglar.

My divinity was far too much occupied at her own anxiety as to the noise to notice my change of expression. Burglar-like I took advantage of her pre-occupation and deftly snatched the revolver from her hand, and in another second was gazing back at her from the window-sill. She had completely recovered her self-possession.

"Yes, perhaps you'd better go," she suggested, "but please leave my revolver on the garden seat below."

I needed no second bidding, for footsteps were plainly audible. In another minute I was in the garden, expecting every moment to run into the arms of the police. But my divinity had lied. Not a soul did I meet, and my only memento of that night's adventure is a pretty little revolver which has not left my person from that day to this.

E. P. Train.

The Girl Who Dreamt.

And who Awoke when Too Late.

She stood under the boughs of an apple tree in the old orchard, and there never was, perhaps never could be, another orchard just like it, with its green hills and valleys and old apple trees with their moss-grown limbs. To-day they upheld a profusion of pink and white bloom against the blue and grey of the sky; and she stood there while the bees hummed over the clover at her feet. She was barely seventeen, and beautiful. The sunlight discovered gold in the brown of her hair, and there were golden lights in the depths of her dark eyes, and she was fair—too fair, some said who wished to find fault with her because she was fair.

She lifted one slender hand towards the apple boughs, and the sleeve fell back from an arm white and finely formed. Then she murmured softly: "Nature, I love thee, I love thee, and I shall devote my life to studying thy beauty, and nothing shall come between this love and me."

The vow was scarcely spoken when a youth of about nineteen, accompanied by a large setter dog, came over the hills to where she stood.

"Ruth!" he exclaimed on seeing her, and she said: "Henry!" then there was silence for a moment, and she said: "I did not know you were at home. When did you come?"

"Yesterday. Grandfather has been ill, but he is better to-day. Aunt Martha sent for me."

"I did not know your grandfather was ill."

"No, it seems you don't care to know anything about us any more. Aunt Martha says you seldom come to the house now. It seems rather hard when a fellow's old playmate gives him and his relatives the go-by like that."

"Well, Henry, we are no longer children, and mother does not approve of our playing together any longer"—this with a little smile—then, seriously: "She never did, much, you know."

"No, but you are making her an excuse for throwing me off, and you know, Ruth, that you are the only one in the world I ever shall care for."

"It's silly for you to talk that way; you have never seen the world. What do you know of it?"

"I know it contains nothing half so lovely as Ruth Dartmore."

Without commenting on this assertion she continued: "Mother says our stations in life are different. You are heir to all things desirable, while I must work for all I hope to possess."

He had pushed his cap back, and his fair hair lay in a wavy mass on his forehead; a most disconsolate look had crept into his blue eyes, while his handsome mouth quivered with a mingled expression of scorn and amusement.

"Heir to Gehenna!" he exclaimed. "Heir to a tumbled-down old house"—waving his hand toward the old, red brick building—"heir to an orchard whose every tree is mortgaged! Yes, our stations in life are different. Your father owns his little home and earns his living. I have no father, no mother, sister, or brother; but I have a hope of making my way in the world, and sustaining the honour of my name."

Ruth felt a yearning tenderness towards him when he spoke of having no mother or sister; but she always enjoyed making him angry. She loved to see the attitude he assumed, the fine scorn that flashed from his eyes, the varying expression of his flexible mouth. So she stood still and watched him, and when he lifted his cap and walked away she still stood there and said nothing.

After he had gone she gathered some apple blossoms and walked home—a pretty little ivy-covered cottage at the other end of the orchard—and the old orchard with all its bloom and beauty in the springtime, with all its golden harvest in summer and autumn, represented a great gulf fixed between

the cottage and the tumbled-down red brick mansion, because a labourer lived in one, and a judge in the other.

* * * * *

Ruth said nothing to her mother about meeting Henry in the orchard. She arranged the apple blossoms, took out her paints and palette, and was very silent and busy all the morning; but that day at dinner Ruth's father remarked to her mother: "I saw Henry Carridine to-day; the judge is ill." Next morning when Ruth put on her bonnet and started out, Mrs. Dartmore said: "I think I would find something besides apple blossoms to paint to-day."

There was an old man who lived in a suburb of the town in a little house, with his dogs and cat and an old housekeeper. He was a painter, and he had a strange theory that painting should be a labour of love, and the reward sought after—perfection in the work. He lived alone; for no one intruded upon him.

When Ruth Dartmore discovered her talent she applied to him for instruction. He would have turned away anyone else; but her youth and beauty were an inspiration to him and her enthusiasm pleased him, so, taking a younger brother or sister with her, three times a week she went to him for instruction.

Shortly after the incident in the orchard she came to him with a sketch of a youth and a maiden and a fine setter dog, under a large, old apple tree, laden with bloom, and told him her plan for the painting—and he was greatly pleased. So she worked all the summer, and he helped her, but she was hard to satisfy. The youth was not handsome enough; the pink and white blossoms did not melt softly enough into the blue and grey of the sky; the tender green of the foliage was not delicate enough, so she would lay aside a nearly finished canvas and begin again. This unrest delighted the old painter.

"You are coming along finely," he said. "You have caught the divine fire."

One morning in early autumn she looked up from the canvas to the old painter.

"It will do, it will do!" he said nodding his head. "It's as beautiful as a dream."

And it was indeed a dream-picture—the youth and maiden and the dog under the grand old apple tree.

"Do you think it is good enough for exhibition?" she asked timidly. A shade passed over the old man's face.

"And you feel the thirst for fame?" he said slowly.

"No; not that," she answered quickly and earnestly.

"It is necessity—I need money."

"And you will sell your birthright? Well, we will see what it is worth in the market."

The old painter had once lived in the world, and still retained a knowledge of the places where such work was sold. So he packed up the painting and sent it, with all its breezy freshness of youth and beauty and country air, away to the city. The young painter had said to him, "I can do nothing now until I see," and he had looked disappointed, and she grew thin and nervous while waiting.

She had seen Henry but once since their meeting in the orchard, and that was the evening after the picture was packed. She met him in the road, and he held out his hand and said: "I am going back to college to-morrow, Ruth. My vacation has not been what I hoped it would be when I came home, but two more terms at college, and then I hope to get into a place where I can command your attention."

"You had better build your air castles without me, Henry."

"You are building yours without me, I suppose?"

"Yes."

And he went away in anger. It was heartbreaking to have him go in this way; but her mother had said: "The Carridines are proud people, and you had better keep away from them." She thought of this, and it helped her to control her feelings.

One day the old painter sent for her; she came to him, white and breathing hard. He held out a roll of bank notes towards her. "Oh, is it enough, enough for a term at a good art school?" she gasped.

"And it is an art school, then, you aim at?" he asked, somewhat appeased.

"Yes, it is enough; we'll make it enough."

Then she left the country and went to London to study art, and her life became a life of labour, where a partial success was followed by failure; then a struggle to succeed again. She taught for a time, and studied for a time, and her name was printed in a paragraph of other names of toilers along the same hard way.

She rarely had time to visit her old home; time passed, and she realised it not. But there was a mixture of vanity and selfishness with all this devotion to art—a desire to write her name above that of Carridine. With this in view she triumphed over all natural feelings, and lost the sweetness that is in work for the work's sake. Her younger brother and sisters grew up, married, and moved away. Her father died while she was in London—and still she was not famous; still she had never painted anything as well as she had painted the youth and maiden under the apple tree.

Sometimes the memory of that early painting came back to her; sometimes in the heat and dust, tired and travel-stained, she would be wafted away in vision and be again in the old orchard.

"If only mother had let us alone!" she would exclaim fretfully.

She had admirers; but having discouraged her youthful lover it was easy to turn away the others.

Henry studied law and rose high in the profession. He married a lawyer's daughter. Ruth had read the details of the marriage in the papers. Even that was long ago now, and in Ruth's hair there was a touch of silver where there had once been a glint of gold; and the light was fading from her eyes.

She received a telegram one evening. It said: "Your mother is dying; come to her." She started for the old home—the home she had not seen for years. When she had changed trains and was on the little train that ran into the old country town, her attention was attracted toward a well-dressed lady and handsome youth, who sat opposite her. There was something about the boy that was familiar to her—something that brought again a vision of apple blossoms. She watched him intently, and noted his fondness for and devotion to the lady whom he called mother, and as she watched a feeling of loneliness came over her and a desire to have him come to her and smile into her eyes.

Then a gentleman who sat next to her leant forward.

"Mrs. Carridine," he exclaimed, "I am glad to see you and Master Henry coming home again."

"Thank you. My husband always wants us to spend part of every summer with his aunt. She is very feeble now and can't be induced to leave the old place."

Ruth Dartmore looked out of the window and knew that this woman was Henry Carridine's wife and the boy, his child.

She arrived in time to see her mother buried, and beside the grave she awoke and found that she was alone in the world!

L. E. Hays.

The Spider and the Fly.

"WILL you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly. But the insect only tossed her head, and tossed it very high. "Why, no," she said, with hauteur, "your style with mine won't run; your dining and reception rooms are, vulgarly, in one."

Wanted, a New Sensation.

THE girl was very rich and the young man was poor but honest. She liked him, but that was all, and he knew it. One night he had been a little more tender than usual. "You are very rich," he ventured. "Yes," she replied, frankly. "I am worth three hundred thousand pounds." "And I am poor." "Yes." "Will you marry me?" "No." "I thought you wouldn't." "Then why did you ask me?" "Oh, just to see how a man feels when he loses three hundred thousand pounds," and the girl smiled

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The Temporary Substitute.

The Tale of a Kitchen Adventure.

Felix Livingstone was not in a good temper.

He had a fortnight's leave, which duty required him to spend with his maiden aunt in the country, while inclination strongly urged him to go up to town in order to see the girl he loved. But on this occasion duty had to be considered, for Miss Drury, the aunt in question, was a wealthy old lady, and he was practically dependent upon her.

All things considered, however, Fate had not been so very unkind to Felix. Left an orphan at an early age, he had been adopted by his mother's elder sister, who had done her duty nobly by him. Now at the age of twenty-five he found himself a subaltern in one of the line regiments, with a handsome allowance from his aunt, and every prospect of becoming her heir. But—there is always a "but" in most people's lives—although Miss Drury had been more than liberal to her nephew and forebore to exercise any but a very nominal restraint over his actions, yet she had given him to understand that she meant to exert her authority in one important matter, namely, the question of his marriage.

In due course of time she intended Felix to become master of Woodlands, her beautiful old house, and since his wife would occupy *her* place as mistress, Miss Drury meant to limit, if not direct, her nephew's choice of a bride.

She did not approve of the modern woman, the up-to-date girl, with her cigarette and her slang, her talk of golf and bridge, her contempt for needlework, and all things pertaining to domesticity, Felix could see in his mind's eye the wife his aunt destined for him—a meek and modest young woman of ultra-refined speech and appearance, and always with a piece of fancy work between her fingers—and he shuddered at the picture. Then he thought, with a sudden tightening of his heart, of Kitty Bellairs, as he had seen her last summer at the house of a brother-officer—beautiful, mischievous, high-spirited, a keen tennis player, a brilliant horsewoman, full of life and laughter. She had charmed the young man's heart out of him, and though Felix tried desperately hard to banish her from his memory, absence, in this case, had certainly made the heart grow fonder.

"I daren't tell Aunt Minnie about Kitty," thought the young man disconsolately. "Of course, if she knew her as I do she couldn't help but love her, although she isn't quite her style, but I don't see how ever they are to meet, since my little darling knows no one in this neighbourhood, and Aunt Min never will come up to town."

In the depths of his heart, Felix was genuinely fond of the old lady, who had so generously mothered him all his life, and he was therefore rather disconcerted to find when he reached Woodlands that Miss Drury was very much perturbed and upset about something. Generally his aunt was a very dainty-looking little old lady, exquisitely dressed, and the perfection of a hostess. But on this particular afternoon she greeted her nephew in an absent-minded fashion, her cap slightly awry, her cheeks flushed, and her beautiful old hands trembling.

"Why, Aunt Minnie," said the young man anxiously, whatever is the matter?"

"Oh, my dear Felix," replied the old lady, looking into his handsome face with troubled blue eyes, "I have had such a dreadful upset. Two of the housemaids are down with influenza, and now Parkins, who is quite invaluable, has declared she can hold up no longer, and has gone to bed seriously ill, I fear."

Felix gave a long whistle of dismay. Parkins was cook-housekeeper at Woodlands, and the pivot upon which the rest of the household turned. She was an exceptionally good cook, and he knew that his aunt prided herself that her dinners were unsurpassed in the neighbourhood.

"I would not have minded had we been alone," continued Miss Drury, "but the house is full of people, and I have a large dinner-party to-morrow."

"What a catastrophe," exclaimed her nephew sympathetically, who knew how vexed was Miss Drury's orderly mind when any household affairs went wrong. "Can't you get a woman from the village to help?"

"Of course I can but you don't know what these village women are like, my dear Felix; dirty, incompetent creatures, and as incapable of sending up a dinner as you are. No, I must just leave Susan, the kitchenmaid, to do her best, but I know I shall be disgraced to-morrow, and I do mind so much if my guests don't have the best of everything. And to make matters worse, that greedy old Sir Gregory is coming, and he always says he never dines so well anywhere as here. You don't know of a cook that you can recommend by any chance, do you, Felix?" she asked desperately.

This wistful appeal touched the young man's heart. As a rule, a subaltern home on leave is not the person one would naturally apply to for a cook, but Miss Drury was at her wits' ends. Felix knitted his brows and thought hard for a minute, at the end of which time a brilliant inspiration came to him.

"Look here, Aunt Minnie," he exclaimed suddenly, "don't you worry any more. I'll go straight up to town first thing to-morrow, and I'll find you a cook somehow, and bring her back with me in the afternoon."

Miss Drury looked at her nephew with tears in her eyes. "Felix," she said solemnly, "if you get me out of this difficulty you may ask me for anything in the world."

Felix was as good as his word. He departed for town directly after breakfast next morning, smiling good-humouredly at the chaff of his fellow-guests, and reappeared triumphant in the afternoon proudly escorting the new cook.

"I've brought her, Aunt Min," he announced, rushing excitedly into Miss Drury's boudoir. "She was at the Rawson's last summer, and an uncommonly good cook she is. Blair is her name, it's a great piece of luck that she was disengaged, you know."

Miss Drury went hurriedly downstairs to inspect the new arrival, and to explain to her the arrangements for the evening's dinner.

"I was a little taken aback at first," she said later on to her nephew. "Blair looks so young and so pretty, and so—er—refined, but she seems very capable and fully qualified to send up an excellent dinner."

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"Yes," replied Felix eagerly, "she has had a course of cooking lessons at South Kensington. I believe she is no end of a swell at it."

"Really, my dear boy," said Miss Drury, looking affectionately at her nephew. "I am most touched by the interest you have shown in this domestic difficulty and the trouble you have taken. If only Blair does not falsify our expectations I shall owe you a debt of gratitude."

The dinner proved an immense success, and even Miss Drury had to confess that Parkins could not have done better. As for Sir Gregory, he chuckled with delight and went steadily through the menu from beginning to end.

"Really, my dear Miss Drury," he said when at length he was obliged to desist, "that cook of yours has surpassed herself. I don't know when I have eaten a better dinner, that soufflé was simply a work of art."

Only one *contretemps* marred the harmony of the evening, and fortunately Miss Drury did not witness this little incident, as it occurred when the ladies had retired to the drawing-room.

Felix was doing the honours of his aunt's table when the sound of a scuffle arrested his attention, and with a hasty excuse to his guests he left the room and rushed into the passage, where he found an ardent young footman trying vainly to embrace a very angry but bewitchingly pretty young woman in a white cap and apron.

"You impudent wretch!" she was saying, "how dare you try and kiss me? Mr. Livingstone, help!"

Felix turned on the man in a perfect fury and dragged him away.

"John," he said, looking as if he could have killed him with pleasure, "leave that lady alone at once and clear out. Here are your wages, go!"

"John," he said, looking as if he could have killed him with pleasure, "leave that lady alone at once and clear out."

The man gazed at him dumb with surprise.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Felix," he stammered at length, "I meant no 'arm. I often used to kiss Mrs. Parkins. I didn't know as 'ow Miss Blair would mind."

The cook's angry face relaxed, and she burst into a peal of laughter, in which, after some hesitation, Felix joined.

"Never mind, John," she said, "I'll forgive you this once, only don't try it again. I dare say Mr. Felix will allow you to stay, if you behave yourself."

Felix nodded impatiently, and the man fled to the lower regions, but it was some minutes before "Miss Blair" took her place at the servants' hall supper looking rather flushed, or before Felix rejoined the men in the dining-room.

Parkins' illness lasted a week, and throughout that time Blair continued to charm the palates of the inmates of Woodlands. All the same, Miss Drury was rather relieved when the last day of the temporary cook's stay came, for try as she would to disbelieve the evidence of her senses, there was no disguising the fact that Felix was always hanging about the kitchen on some pretext or another. That her nephew could so far forget what was due both to himself and to her, as to even carry on a mild flirtation with a servant, Miss Drury would not allow for a moment. Her horror can therefore be better imagined than described when, on descending to the kitchen the last afternoon for the purpose of paying Blair her wages, she saw, on opening the door, a pretty white-capped head reposing on her nephew's shoulder, while his arm was tenderly clasping an aproned waist.

"Kitty, darling," she heard him say tenderly, "I couldn't let you go away without telling you I loved you. I know I ought not to have done so, for goodness only knows when I shall be able to marry you."

"Do you think Miss Drury will be very angry?" asked the girl.

Miss Drury coughed, and at the ominous sound the guilty couple started apart and looked with dismay at the intruder.

The old lady's face had turned very white, and Felix, cut to the quick by her piteous expression, crossed the room hastily and took her hand.

"Don't look so shocked, Aunt Minnie," he said, "this is not a cook really; it is the lady I love, Miss Kitty Bellairs. I met her at the Rawson's last summer and fell in love with her, and I knew she could cook beautifully, so when you were in such a fix I asked her to come and help. We—we thought, perhaps, you might take a fancy to her and ask her to stop."

"Are you Archie Bellairs' daughter?" asked Miss Drury in astonishment.

"Yes," said the girl gently, "he is dead, you know, and I am an orphan and very poor—but I love Felix."

The old lady's eyes grew very wistful and tender as she remembered the far-off days of her youth when poverty had stood between *her* and the one whom she loved—Archie Bellairs.

She took the girl's hand and smilingly put it into that of her nephew.

"So do I, my dear," she said, "and I am sure you will make him an excellent wife. I shall be exceedingly glad to offer the temporary substitute a permanent place in my household."

Edith Bass.

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The Secret of the West Wing.

Telling of a Terrible Discovery.

"Welcome, Alf, my boy!"

My old friend Stephen Gregory grasped my hand as he said these words, and did not release it until he had led me up the steps of his home, and begun to assist me to unfasten my great coat.

"And how are you, my lad?" he continued, without giving me time to reply to his hearty reception. "Why, you look as brown as a berry, and certainly none the worse for your fifteen years nabobism."

I had just returned to England after having endured the trying climate of India for fifteen years, and had hastened at once to the old mansion where I had spent so many happy days in the company of my school chum Stephen and which was, at the time of my story, in his sole possession.

A substantial repast was provided for me in the old dining-room, and after I had done justice to it, and the grey-headed butler (who had officiated in my father's time) had brought in the wine, Stephen and I were soon deep in conversation on topics peculiarly interesting to me.

"So you think the old place is changed?" he said musingly, in reply to a remark that had fallen from me. "I've not noticed it; but it may be, it may be."

"Indeed it is, Stephen," I said; "and I think you are allowing the best part of the house to fall into decay. Now, in your father's day the west wing——"

"Hush!" he cried, interrupting me with a startled look in his eyes. "Don't mention that, for Heaven's sake! She loved those rooms."

In a moment I had grasped his hand.

"Forgive me, Stephen!" I exclaimed, as the terrible past flashed across my mind, and I saw I had opened an old wound.

"There is nothing to forgive, Alf, my boy," he said, looking into the bright fire with an anxious, troubled face. "You could not know of all the horror of that terrible time."

Indeed I could not; for I was but a boy when I went out to India. Nevertheless, I had heard sufficient whilst there of my friend's unfortunate marriage to convince me of the pain which any allusion to it would give to him.

I had heard how he had married a beautiful girl, and how fondly he had loved her, and how, after three months of married life, she had deserted him. With whom and whither she had gone, no one knew; and her name had become almost a forgotten sound at Stanley House.

I changed the subject of conversation, and tried to make him forget the unpleasant recollections which my words had raised, by relating some of the most amusing adventures that had befallen me whilst abroad; but, though he listened with interest, and seemed to try to shake off the gloom that had settled upon his mind, he never quite regained his wonted cheerfulness during the remainder of the evening, and retired early to rest, excusing himself by saying it was his custom.

Amongst the evils of civilisation which my somewhat stormy passage through life had taught me, that of late hours was by no means the smallest; and, knowing it would be useless for me to turn into bed before midnight, I put on my hat, lit another cigar, and strolled into the grounds to get a breath of fresh air.

It was a fine summer night. The moon was shining brightly from a clear starlit sky. I knew every foot of the ground, and visited many of my favourite haunts; and it must have been after eleven o'clock before I began to think of returning. My cigar had gone out when I reached the bottom of the long avenue of tall trees, and, beginning to feel chilly, I walked somewhat quickly towards the house, crunching the gravel beneath my feet as I went.

As I drew near the front door my attention was attracted by the sudden appearance of a man bearing a lantern, who had evidently heard my footsteps, for he stopped and awaited my approach. At first I thought he was one of the servants; but, upon drawing nearer, I was surprised to find it was Stephen. I hastened to speak to him, when, to my great astonishment, after glancing at me eagerly, he turned away without any sign of recognition, and hurried rapidly in the direction of the deserted west wing.

My first intention was to call out after him; but, upon second thoughts, I decided not to do so; for I was persuaded that he had seen and recognised me, and that perhaps my company might not be desired; so I retraced my steps, entered the house, and was soon in bed and asleep.

The next morning when I came downstairs, I found Stephen already in the breakfast-room awaiting me. He was standing with his back to the fire.

"Good morning, Alf," he said, smiling in his cheerful manner. "You are an exception to most lovers of late hours, I see."

"Yes," I replied; "I sleep soundly and therefore rise early."

"You'll find the nights long and dull here, I'm afraid, after the excitement to which you have been accustomed."

"Oh, no, not at all," I said. "There are so many old associations about Stanley House that I think I shall never be dull here. Now, last night, I strolled through the grounds, and did not return until close upon midnight."

"These late hours seem to me to be a very stupid custom, and one which I could never cultivate. I think, my boy, that you would have been much wiser if you had turned in when I did, and slept until morning."

"Why, I daresay I was in bed before you."

"In bed before me?" he repeated, with a puzzled look, "What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say—that I was in bed and asleep before you were; unless you finish your rest and rise before midnight."

"You must be joking, Alf," he said incredulously. "I was in bed by nine o'clock, and was up this morning at six."

"Surely you must be mistaken, Stephen; for I met you, or your double, at the top of the avenue last night, as I was returning to the house."

"Impossible."

"Indeed I did. I would have spoken to you, but you hurried away; and I thought you had seen me, and wished to be alone."

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"It could not have been me. I was never out of the house after seven o'clock."

All that day I was haunted by the recollection of what I had seen on the previous night, and of Stephen's denial. I had heard singular stories of his being a somnambulist, before I had left England, and could not help wondering if he was still addicted to freaks of that kind; but as I had never seen him walk in his sleep, and as I had only half believed the tales I had been told, I was inclined to accept this explanation as a solution of the problem. However, I was determined to solve the mystery.

As soon as all were in bed, therefore, on the night following that on which I had arrived at Stanley House, I again went out into the grounds, determined, if I met the mysterious person whom I had seen on the previous night, to follow him and discover who he was.

I had taken up my point of observation just in front of the west wing of the house, which had been so long shut up and left to fall into decay. So great indeed had been my friend's horror lest any portion of it should be touched by human foot, that not only had he boarded up every window and door that had communication without, but he had also caused to be built up every door that had given access from it to the main body of the building.

I walked to and fro until past midnight, and was about to give up my quest as hopeless, and return to the house, when I heard a footstep on the damp gravel walk approaching. I drew back into the shadow of the trees, and peered forth into the darkness, for at that moment a thick cloud shut out the light of the moon.

Nearer and nearer the footsteps came, and at length the glimmering of the lantern shone out on the darkness. The man bearing the light went up to the principal entrance of the west wing, where he paused, and a moment later I heard a key shoot back the heavy lock; the next instant the light and the man disappeared as the door closed behind them.

Animated and excited, I stepped quickly but softly, across the gravel walk to the door, where for a moment I paused and listened. A footstep was ascending the creaking staircase. I waited until I heard it on the second flight before I tried the door. I found it open, and entered softly, closing it behind me. Before proceeding further, I cautiously took off my boots, and then I ascended the cold, clammy stairs, that smelt of the tomb.

From the second landing there opened a suite of apartments, which I remembered had been called the strong rooms because they were in the very heart of the building, had few windows, and only one doorway for ingress and egress. The heavy oak door that opened into these rooms I found was ajar, and a bright light streamed out between the opening.

To my great astonishment, when I entered this room, I heard voices in the apartment beyond. At first I was so amazed that I could not distinguish a single word that was spoken; but as I became calm, and after drawing close to the door of the room from which the sound proceeded, I distinctly heard a woman's voice, in tearful accents, saying:

"Oh, if you love me, deliver me from this place! What have I done that I should be forced to bear this punishment? Have I not loved with a true woman's love? Speak to me. Do not look at me with eyes so glassy that they seem to see not. Give me one word, that I may hear you as the same Stephen that you were before this fearful malady overtook you. Let me again see the light of Heaven, and the faces of my friends."

I crept softly nearer to the door, and got into a position from which I could partly distinguish the occupants of the room and their surroundings. It was a handsomely-furnished apartment, half boudoir, half drawing-room. Every luxury which the heart could desire was scattered about in endless variety.

In the centre of the floor stood Stephen; but with such a strange, wicked, frenzied expression on his face, that, had I not known his features well, I should have thought it could not be he. Before him knelt a woman whose face was buried in her hands.

"You shall not leave me thus!" she said, as he turned to go, "I must, and will have my liberty!"

She had started to her feet, and ran to the door. But Stephen, still without any change in his fixed, staring countenance, seized her roughly by the arm, and pushed her from him, and walked quickly towards the door.

I had hardly time to draw back into the shadow of a heavy curtain, when he entered the room where I was, and walked quickly across to the landing, closing this last door after him, and locking it. Thus I found myself also a prisoner. I heard his footsteps descend the stairs, and then the sound died slowly away.

For a few moments I stood puzzled and wondering what course I should pursue.

I was aroused from my thoughts by a sob from the occupant of the next chamber. Going up to the door which Stephen had closed after him, I knocked, and then entered. My tap had evidently not been heard, for I found the graceful form seated in a chair, in an attitude which betokened despair, her arms upon the table, her head leaning forward, and her beautiful dishevelled hair falling in waving folds about her.

"Madam."

I had walked up to her, and placed my hand upon her shoulder.

"Oh!" And she turned towards me her pale, tearful, horror-stricken face, then shrank away in fear. "Who are you? Pray do not hurt me. I know I am helpless."

It was some time before I could convince her that I was really a friend; for so long had she been buried in these rooms that her mind had become almost unhinged, and her sense of perception blunted. By degrees, however, I made her understand who I was, and how I had come there; and then, in answer to my questions, I gleaned the history of her captivity.

When Stephen married her she was a handsome young girl of eighteen, and he was verging on the period of middle age. For three months after their marriage he had been kind and attentive—all, in fact, that a wife could desire of her husband. Just at the end of that time, however, he discovered accidentally several letters, which had been written by her before her marriage, to a former lover; and for some days afterwards, he was moody, jealous, and strange in his conduct.

One night he entered her room with that fixed, frenzied, wicked look upon his face which she had never seen there before, but which had marred his features in all her interviews with him since, and directed her by signs to follow him, a mandate which in her terror she readily obeyed.

He conducted her to a gloomy chamber, lighted only by a small oil-lamp, and then left her, locking the door behind him; but always coming in the night, and bearing himself in a silent, changed, peculiar manner.

At length he led her back again to her own suite of apartments (those in which I had discovered her), where, during her absence, all the windows had been built up, thus cutting off communication with the outer world. Here he had visited her almost every night since, bringing her the necessaries

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saries of life, coming like an apparition, and going as he came.

"I think those foolish letters of mine," she said, in conclusion, "written before I had learnt to love my husband, have turned his brain. I was warned before I married him that he was affected with the malady of sleep-walking, and that when under its influence he not only lost complete control over his reason, but also seemed to live a double life.

"When awake he was generous, frank and good; but when in a somnambulant state, I was told he was morose, jealous, wicked—in a word, insane; and that in his waking hours he had no recollection of what took place or what he did when in this latter state."

Between us we managed to smash open the door by battering it almost to splinters with the heaviest furniture we could wield.

I took my *protégée* to the rectory, where the rector, who was an old college friend of mine, was not a little surprised to receive such visitors at so early an hour.

Before returning to Stanley House, I rode on the rector's cob to my brother's doctor, who lived about three miles away, and consulted him upon Stephen's sad condition. He told me that he was quite aware of the facts of the case, but that he had not for a moment thought the malady could have been capable of working so much mischief.

He then made the suggestion that in all probability a crisis in the disease would now be reached, brought about by the mental shock which the discovery of the escape would give when next the somnambulist visited the west wing. The result of this crisis would either leave him a hopeless maniac or completely cure him.

At the doctor's request I arranged to meet him the same night at twelve o'clock, in order to watch Stephen's movements. I then rode back to the rectory, and from there proceeded with all haste to Stanley House.

After resting in my room for a short while, I came downstairs, and found Stephen more cheerful and genial than usual, all unconscious poor fellow, of the fate hanging over him.

At night he retired to rest at the usual time, and I went out into the grounds to meet the doctor, about an hour and a half afterwards. When I met him we proceeded to the west wing together, to watch the effect of the shock of discovery upon the patient.

As soon as we reached the door, I saw that Stephen had been before us, for the door was ajar. With a heart that beat fast with my fears, I hurried into the house, and was about to run upstairs, when I tumbled over some obstacle at the bottom. The doctor, who was following closely, carrried a dark lantern, and its light soon revealed to us the bleeding form of my unhappy chum.

"He is dead," the doctor said, rising from his knees, after making a hasty examination of the body. "In his frenzy he must have dashed himself down the stairs. Poor fellow! we have been too late to save him!"

Five years have fled since that time. Stanley House has been newly painted and renovated, and again holds a happy bride and bridegroom. A fair face looks over my shoulder as I write, and drops a tear upon the paper that contains a history of her sorrows. But a smile flits about her lips as I kiss her; and we look out together upon the beautiful scene, in the midst of which stands our home, and forget the darkness of the past in the brightness of the future.

G. P. Lane.

OUR TARTAN COVERS.

Reproductions of famous Scotch Tartans are appearing at intervals on the cover of *Short Stories*. The following have already been issued: Menzies (with No. 709); McPherson (with No. 711); McLeod (with No. 715). Copies of these numbers may be obtained through any newsagent.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

September 30.—Those whose birthdays fall to-day will have a favourable year; travelling and change are promised. Domestic affairs go better.

Girls have attentions paid them, and if engaged, they marry.

The day is good for serious and permanent undertakings; for marriage, visiting, and engaging servants.

A child born this day will be affectionate, thoughtful, and persevering. Will make a good speculator, and do well in business.

October 1.—A promising year for business, and making new friends; those in employ meet with preferment.

Young girls will find love affairs interesting; if born between six and seven p.m. they become engaged or marry.

A good day for most things, between one and five p.m. especially. Buy, sell, and speculate; ask favours of superiors.

A child born here will be fortunate in life, making many powerful friends. Will be generous, high-minded, and far-seeing.

October 2.—Those who celebrate birthdays to-day will need some extra care with health and in their business affairs. An active year.

Girls born near four p.m. will experience some disappointment in love and need care with opposite sex.

The day is not good for dealing with land or property, engaging servants, or for marriage. Guard against chills and falls.

A child born here will be fond of travel and change. The mind will be quick, original, but lacking in self-confidence.

October 3.—A better year for health and domestic affairs. Many pleasant events in the home circle.

Young girls will have opportunities of marriage, and find it a good year for such an event.

A child born to-day will be clever and skilful with its hands. The mind will be quick, strong, and business-like.

October 4.—An unfavourable year; quarrels, and much anxiety in business and home affairs. Health will need some care.

Girls born near nine a.m. or seven p.m. will have some worry and annoyance with opposite sex.

The day is not good to speculate, travel, or begin new undertakings. Have a care against accident.

A child born here will be stubborn, rash, and improvident. It should keep in the employ of others.

October 5.—With care business and domestic matters will progress favourably. Better for aged people.

Young girls will have attentions from elderly men or widowers.

A child born to-day will be fortunate in business. The disposition will be kind, steady, and persevering.

October 6.—A good year for business and money matters; health may need a little care. Those in employ will do well.

Girls born near eleven a.m. or eight p.m. will find love affairs very interesting.

The day is good to ask favours, deal with lawyers, the clergy, and professional men.

A child born this day will be fortunate and will rise in life. Will be ambitious, generous, clever, and active.

Asturel.

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THE GREAT CUT-PICTURE COMPETITION.

CLOSES OCTOBER 7.

THE FINAL PICTURE.

TWENTY-FIVE AWARDS OF VALUABLE GRAMOPHONES.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find fifty-four pictorial squares, which when placed together in their proper position will form a complete picture.

Each square is numbered; that, however, has nothing to do with their correct position, of course. What we want you to do is to cut the jumble below into the fifty-four squares and carefully paste the squares in their correct order on to a sheet of paper.

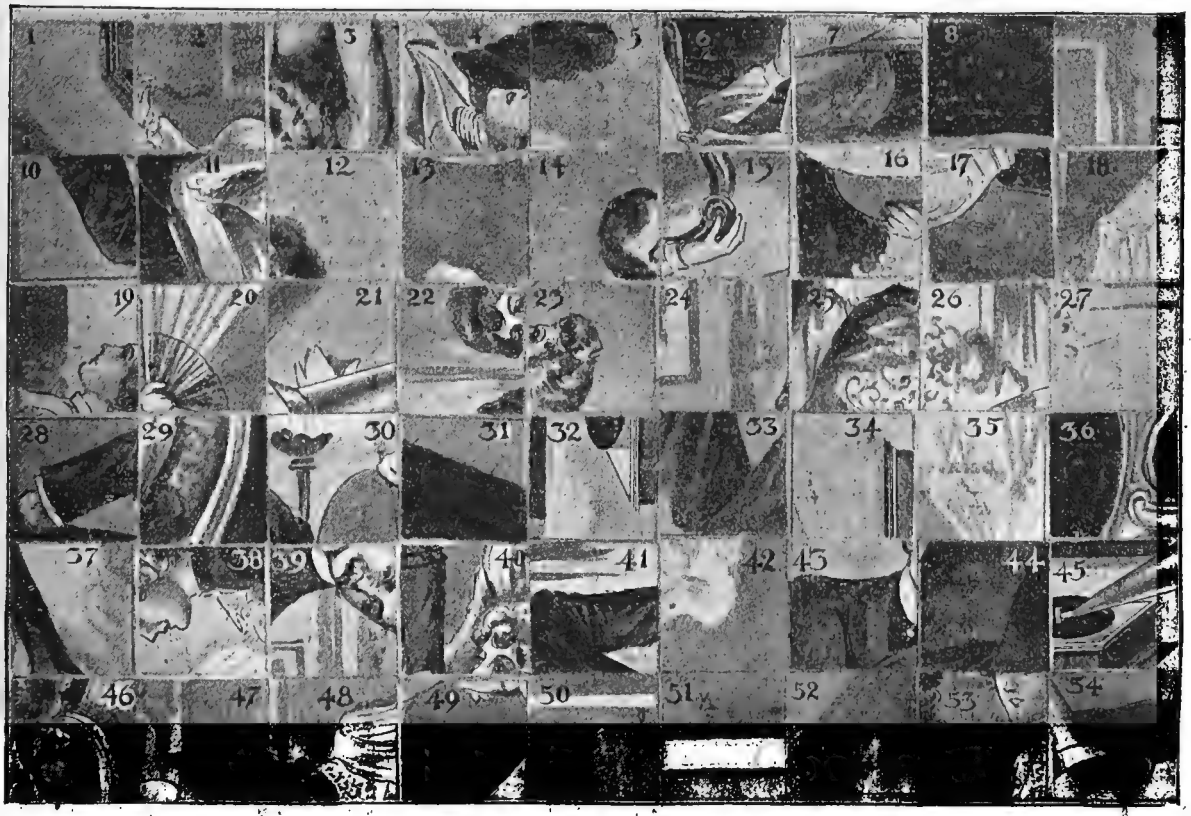
When you have pasted up the complete picture, pin it to the two pictures that have already appeared, attach your name and address, and send the three to us in an envelope marked "Cut-Picture."

All attempts must arrive by first post Tuesday morning, Oct. 7th.

A splendid Gramophone will be presented to each person whose pictures are correct or equally nearly correct. In the event of there being more than twenty-five competitors correct or equally nearly correct the prizes will be awarded to those whose attempts are most neatly done.

The Gramophones are beautifully made, fit to grace any drawing-room, and an everlasting source of amusement. They are fitted with concert sound boxes, and with each will be given two records.

The Gramophone is one of the most delightful companions for the long winter evenings. None of your friends can talk like a talking machine can, and give you the same amount of fun as it produces. It is the very essence of good and genial companionship, which never tires you. What it says, or what it sings, is always interesting. Once you have heard it you want always to hear it, and it is ever ready and willing to oblige.



Readers will please bear in mind the fact that the references in this week's article to Percival Hope (expressing Cynthia's feelings) were written long before her meeting with him in the early part of last month. After that meeting Cynthia wished to make certain alterations in this and the following instalments, but I felt that to allow her to do so would be to spoil the whole idea of the articles, so I was compelled to refuse.—ED.

THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

NEW READERS START HERE.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, where Sir John Strickland proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, during which Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds, and that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis-Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with Casellis, a man from Jamaica, who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she managed to buy his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably. Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived. He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell in a dead faint. Doctors were called, and pronounced it a paralytic seizure. Toby next called. In three days his uncle's bill must be redeemed. If this was not done he vowed that he would shoot himself.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew.

Frankie's next adventure was to drug an American billiard player, whose opponent she had backed heavily. When alone she was accused by Pettigrew, who swore to condemn her before the whole world. She secured his silence by managing to be found in his embrace by Lord Chesterton.

My cousin now meets a Hungarian *attaché*.

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FRANKIE FALLS IN LOVE.

THE name of the Hungarian *attaché* was Reichardt Von Essler. He belonged to a very old, and therefore a most high family. That was proved by his lack of title—only very superior persons in Hungary can afford not to be Counts or Barons.

I was quite used to men admiring my cousin and falling awfully in love with her. But the effect that love and admiration produced in Von Essler was something quite uncommon. Early each morning there arrived from him a floral offering, acres of roses, lilies, orchids, rarest and choicest of blooms. The flowers were followed by a special messenger with a note of inquiry about Frankie's health. Close on the letter, Von Essler would himself arrive, and whirl my cousin off—he was impetuous as Frankie herself—for a spin on his motor or a drive on his tandem.

They made a splendid couple, her fair beauty set off by his dark and brilliant face, his gleaming eyes, his flashing smile. As for Lord Kinross, Frankie impatiently waived aside his claims on her attention.

"I don't care what he thinks," she said, when I suggested he might not like her to go out so frequently with Reichardt.

"I've given way to him too much already. If he doesn't approve of me"—she flashed a glance over her shoulder into the long mirror that showed her tall, lithe figure to perfection—"well, I can sustain the loss of his regard."

"Frankie, you don't mean you are going to break off your engagement with Lord Kinross? Why——" I paused, the thought of all she had done, all she had suffered and caused others to suffer to bring about that engagement choked me.

"Don't worry yourself, dearie, I'm not going to throw Hartland over. But I mean to enjoy myself. Cynthia, you can't tell what a joy it is to meet a man so fascinating and so clever as Reichardt. He is so strong, so fearless, and so light-hearted. He is——"

Her soliloquy was interrupted.

"Lord Kinross, please, ma'am," said the maid; "he's in the drawing-room."

With an exclamation of impatience, Frankie swept downstairs, a vision in a dinner gown of pale green mousseline de soie.

"I can't spare you a minute, Hartland," she said. "I'm going to meet Von Essler at the Carlton at eight o'clock, and it's past seven already. Lady Gaveston is coming and Cynthia also. Well"—as he looked grave, almost troubled—"what is the matter?"

"I see so little of you lately, Frankie. It's a week since Lady Daventry's ball, and you've hardly spared me an hour."

"My dear boy, consider how much we shall see of each other in the future! Next week at Cowes, for instance, we shall be together every day, and all day long. I'm not going to run the risk of boring you."

"My dearest Frankie!" Hartland kissed her hand, and I felt horribly in the way; I knew my cousin wished me to remain, so, much embarrassed, I took up a book and studied hard.

"All the same, dear, it's hardly necessary to bestow so much of your society on Von Essler. Break your engagement for this evening, at any rate; send him a wire, and come out with me instead. I'll go anywhere, do anything you like, Frankie, if you'll throw him over."

"I do believe you're jealous. Don't deny it, it's quite charming of you, Hartland. But even for you I can't afford to be ill-bred. It takes a duchess at the least to act rudely and remain distinguished. I've promised Von Essler, and"—she paused—"I always keep my word," she said.

The flicker of a smile twitched at the corners of his lordship's mouth.

"Well, I'll give way to-night," he said. "What of to-morrow, are you engaged also?"

"Yes, and the next day, and the day after that. You're exacting, Hartland, and that's the truth. The more I give way to you, the more you ask. You are becoming a perfect tyrant. First, I mustn't bet or gamble, then I must not run up bills, or flirt, or be admired. Now——" she laughed and shook her head. "I'm going to make the most of my liberty, dearie; September isn't far off now, and then I shall have to be prim and decorous as—as Lady Gaveston. It's no use to look cross, Hartland—I mean to have my own way."

She looked up at him, mutinous, bewitching, and, as usual, she prevailed. As with others, so with Kinross, the admiration of other men for the woman of his choice increased his own. A month ago, and Frankie would not have ventured to dispute his will. Now things were changed. By a show of indifference she had riveted her chains more firmly. Fearful of losing her, Kinross gave way on every point.

He departed, troubled but amenable. Frankie kissed her hand to him from the window, then turned away with a gesture of relief.

"I've some good news for you," she said, smiling. "I've wired to Chesterton to join us at the Carlton. I didn't see why you should be afflicted with the 'testifier,'" such was my cousin's irreverent soubriquet for Lady Gaveston.

"It's very nice of you, Frankie," I answered. "But you know what Milady is. She will talk to *somebody*, and she likes Chesterton—he listens so attentively."

"She likes somebody else better," said my cousin. "Who? Why Hiram, to be sure; she'll revel at the opportunity of getting a subscription out of him for one of her societies. I've wired to him as well."

"Does he know?"

"What, that Milady is to be his fate at dinner? Rather not, he thinks he's going to take me out—alone."

It was quite unkind of Frankie, but it was most amusing all the same. The three men were waiting for us at the Carlton—Von Essler, Pettigrew, and Chesterton. I am bound to say the last named was the only one who seemed entirely pleased when we arrived. The Hungarian appeared disappointed to see *me*, and Pettigrew was not enraptured to meet Lady Gaveston.

I shall never forget that evening; it was one of the brightest the most delightful times I ever had, for the first part, at all events. Frankie was in one of her irresistible moods. Laughing, scoffing, grave and gay by turns, all smiles one moment, all demurity the next.

Even Lady Gaveston responded to her influence, and so far unbent as to express herself satisfied with the dinner, if not the conversation.

Town was already beginning to get empty, and the Carlton was not so crowded as the last time we were there, though it was far from being empty. When we were half way through our dinner we had a surprise not altogether pleasing. The table next our own was vacant, and when the party for whom it was reserved made their appearance I received something of a shock. It proved to be Mrs. Vernon and her daughter Mary, Lord Kinross and Percival Hope!

Frankie smiled and bowed to them all, with a specially kindly glance for Mary. Lady Gaveston made a grave salutation, and immediately assumed an air of great aloofness from the rest of us. Reichardt flushed angrily, and Chesterton looked glum.

I don't know how I looked, but my heart beat so loud and fast that it was painful.

I nodded to Mary and Lord Kinross, but I could not meet Percival's glance. I stole a look at him unobserved. He was graver, older, I thought, than when I first knew him. I hoped he would not look at me; if he smiled or spoke I felt I should lose my self-control. The memory of that night at the

ball, the Duchess of Warminster's ball, came back to me. I lived again those cruel five minutes, when, with his hand clasping mine, he waited for my answer. If I had answered differently!

Ah, well! It was no use to look backward. I had done as well as I was able, as well as circumstances and my cousin would permit me. But——

I drank some champagne and laughed a little hysterically at some remark of Chesterton's. His Lordship was behaving quite strangely that night. He gazed at me so long and so earnestly that I became embarrassed. He was looking very well; evening dress, the severest test of a man's distinction, became him infinitely. Next to Von Essler, he was the best-looking man present. Yes, he was better-looking far than Percival.

We finished dinner some time before our friends at the next table. Kinross sent a note over to Frankie, suggesting we should all go to the theatre. He had procured two boxes at the Lyceum. Reichardt seemed to understand instinctively what the note contained; before my cousin had time to finish reading it, he leant over, and in a clear, cool voice remarked:

"Don't forget, Mrs. Norton, that you are engaged to see my pictures this evening. I've quite a little gallery at my place. It's not five minutes' drive from here, you know, in St. James's Street."

I knew quite well that there was no engagement of the kind, and so, I think, did Kinross. He flashed an indignant look at the Hungarian, and seemed positively enraged when Frankie smilingly pencilled her regrets that she could not go to the Lyceum.

Oblivious of his frowns and Mary's reproachful air, she signified her intention of viewing Von Essler's pictures.

"We'd better be going," she said, glancing at Lady Gaveston, "I can't bear to be hurried when I look at beautiful things. I want to spend a long time over the pictures."

Lady Gaveston was bound to respond to the suggestion. She liked pictures but little, and the Hungarian still less, but her duties as a chaperon compelled her to endure both. She rose, and Pettigrew respectfully draped her shawl—she persisted in wearing a shawl—about her shoulders.

As Chesterton stooped to clasp my cloak, Percival's eyes met mine. Sorrow, regret, reproach, I read therein, and a faint tinge of the old tenderness. My cheeks grew hot, I felt the smart of tears, and a sob came in my throat. He saw my agitation and half rose from his seat. At the moment Chesterton leant down to whisper something in my ear. Percival gave a contemptuous shrug, sat back, and resumed his dinner.

I felt hurt, mortified, and most unhappy. That look in his eyes haunted me. I felt a tug at my heart every time I thought of him throughout the evening.

Von Essler had a lovely flat in St. James's Street. The rooms were beautifully furnished in the most perfect taste. The one I like the best was panelled in oak, with a wonderful Japanese freize of scarlet poppies and weird-looking dragons. A narrow shelf, a foot from the ceiling, went right round the room, supporting statuettes in bronze and silver of Japanese demons, gods and goddesses.

The pictures were in a room to themselves. They were chiefly landscapes, romantic Hungarian landscapes, remote fastnesses and lonely castles.

"There is a picture here—Von Essler paused before a curtained alcove—"for which I must ask your indulgence. It was painted by a man whose presumption in choosing so difficult a subject can be forgiven only by the earnestness with which he has striven to master it. I am that all-unworthy painter, and my picture"—he drew back the curtain. From a canvas, yet wet, there looked at us the face of Frankie. It was a wonderful likeness, the face, with its ever-changing eyes, now soft, tender, beseeching, now brilliant and hard, seemed real.

It was Frankie herself that looked at you, Frankie in her most brilliant, most inspired moment.

"It's a masterpiece," said Pettigrew. "I congratulate you, Mrs. Norton," and he smiled in an odd sort of way at Frankie.

"It's a great piece of work," said Chesterton, "I'd no idea you could paint like that, Von Essler?"

"It is rarely I have a subject so inspiring," answered Reichardt, with a low bow to my cousin.

Frankie stood silent, almost subdued, before her picture.

"Cynthia," she said suddenly, "am I like that? No, don't interrupt," as the men murmured a convinced assent, "I want the child to answer for herself, she can't help telling the truth. Well"—she paused—"speak out, Cynthia. Am I like my portrait?"

"Yes," I said softly, "only more beautiful."

Frankie flushed and squeezed my hand, and Reichardt looked gratified. Lady Gaveston evidently did not approve. She gave a loud and prolonged sniff. Then, as though her patience were exhausted, she turned on Pettigrew, and, with sudden and alarming unexpectedness, asked for a donation to her society for abolishing the idols of the heathen!

Hiram seemed inclined to question the aims and objects of the society. Nothing loth, Milady launched a stream of statistics at his head. The rest of us fled, leaving them to argue it out together.

Reichardt and my cousin walked into the smoking-room. I was about to follow them when Chesterton laid his hand upon my arm.

"Come in here," he said, opening the door of a cosy little apartment, one of those queer-shaped rooms you find in flats, all sides and angles.

I settled myself on a comfortable lounge and glanced expectantly at his lordship. He looked grave, as though he had something on his mind. I felt sure he had some bad news to tell me.

"You're going to say something dreadful," I cried. "I feel it, I know it; people always look like that when they've something horrid to say. They think it's better to tell it by degrees. What is it?"

He smiled, and shook his head.

"It's nothing very dreadful," he said quietly. "But it's most important. May I sit by you, Cynthia?"

I nodded, much astonished. Chesterton didn't ask my permission to—well, to sit beside me as a rule.

"You're looking very sweet to-night," he went on after a pause, "I like you in pink, Cynthia."

Somebody else I remembered had said that. I caught my breath. I wished I had not seen Percival that evening.

"What little hands you have," he said tenderly, "so soft and white." As he spoke he clasped my hand in his, and there was a pause. I did not dare to look at him, but I felt his eyes were on my face. Dimly I realised what it was he had to tell me, and—I was sorry.

"I wish I could say pretty things!" he exclaimed. "If I could only tell you what I feel—but"—he bent his head and kissed my fingers—"you know I am fond of you, little girl? You must, women always understand these things. And"—he drew nearer—"I don't think you quite dislike me. You know I asked if it was any use for me to enter for the Cynthia Stakes, didn't I? You said I might, and I've made all the running I know how. Is it any good, Cynthia? Tell me, speak out. Say 'Yes,' or 'No'! I'm not one to shirk a fence if I've got to take it."

He strove to meet my eyes, but I turned my head away. I liked him, sometimes I liked him very much. But was it fair only to give liking in exchange for love? And he did love me, I was sure of that. I could not answer, I wished he would not ask me for an answer. I did not want to lose him. Life would have seemed very strange to me without "big Chesterton," as his chums called him. And yet——

He grew impatient.

"Speak to me, Cynthia," he said. Then, as I still kept silence, he sprang to his feet, and with a swift movement pulled me up to him.

"I'm going to kiss you, Cynthia," he said deliberately, "Then perhaps you'll know your own mind, one way or the other. If you say 'Yes' it's all right. If not—well, I think you deserve it as a punishment."

"Lord Chesterton," I cried indignantly, "I—I——"

"You're a coquette, my dear," he said, "and deserve to be punished." And then I blush to say he kissed me—twice!

What did I do?

Collapsed into a chair and hid my face, crimson to the tips of my ears. I felt—I can't tell *how* I felt.

"You're not angry, Cynthia?"

I shook my head. Somehow, I wasn't angry, though, of course, I should have been.

"And you'll marry me? You must now, you know, after——" he smiled in a hateful way. I know it was hateful, though I wasn't looking at him.

"Look here, little girl," he said softly, "I'm not going to take 'No' for an answer. What is more, you don't want me to. You're not quite sure yet? Well, it's best to take time. I'll give you six weeks to think the matter over. Then you must answer. You agree?"

I looked up at him, big, tall and strong—and I agreed.

"I bar flirting, Cynthia," he said, "mind that."

"I'm glad to hear it," I returned. "Mrs. Curtis Blount——"

"Don't, dear"—he turned quite red—"there's a good girl, don't! Your cousin——" he paused. "She flirts a little, don't you know?" he said tentatively.

"Whatever Frankie does is right in my eyes," I said firmly.

"I know, and I like you all the better for it, still——"

"Make your mind easy," I said, laughing. "I'll be very good—for six weeks!" and with that I left him to find Frankie.

All the way home that night I thought of Chesterton. "Jack," he had asked me to call him, He had been very nice. Not a word had he said against Frankie, although I knew he doubted and suspected her of more than flirting. And yet he was every bit as honourable, as upright, as Percival Hope! *He* would not try and part me from my cousin, my dear Frankie whom I loved so much!

I did not tell my cousin what had happened between me and Chesterton, but, with her usual quickness, she surmised that something had taken place.

"Any news, Cynthia?" she said, as I wished her good-night.

I shook my head.

"Well, I've some for you!" She threw off her opera-cloak and stood before the glass, a flush on her cheeks, a light in her eyes.

"Reichardt Von Essler is the one man in the world I could care for!" she said passionately.

"*Frankie!*"

"I mean it; there's nothing I wouldn't do for him. For him I'd give up money, position, the frocks, the jewels, all that I've striven to gain. I'd leave everything, I'd go barefoot, I'd live on a crust, I'd work, ay, work hard for him."

"I don't see there's anything very wonderful about Von Essler, Frankie. He's good-looking, certainly, clever and—and tall. But so are other men."

"You foolish child, it makes no difference. He is the one man who made me, even for a moment, forget myself. I've been fond of others, yes, in a way. I was fond of Sir John, Kinross, and—and——" she paused. "But Reichardt——" she paused and flung out her hands in an ecstasy. "I'm as silly as you, Cynthia; no girl was ever more in love!"

"But you've only known him for so short a time. It's—it's impossible you can feel all this for a man you hadn't seen a month ago!"

"It's not the length of time you know a man, my dear, but the strength of the feeling he rouses in you. I might know some people twenty years, and care no more than when I met them first. Directly I saw Reichardt I knew that he was a man I could love with my whole heart, my whole strength. And he"—she paused, and a flush of rose tinted the whiteness of her cheeks—"he *loves* me, loves me more than all the world. He is ready to prove it, he will abandon his career, throw up his prospects, all for my sake!"

"Are you going to marry him, Frankie?" I asked in horror.

She smiled. "Why not?" she asked.

"You're engaged to another man, and—and—oh, Frankie, don't be angry, but I don't like Von Essler—I don't trust him. I think he's insincere. I beg you not to place your future in his hands. He is——"

Frankie interrupted me.

"That will do, Cynthia," she said quietly, "you've said enough. Get to bed now, you must be tired."

Much disquieted, I obeyed her. I felt frightened and distressed about my cousin. I could not understand this new development, and I feared it.

The next day or two I saw but little of Frankie, who spent the time riding or driving with Von Essler. My anxiety concerning her, however, was lessened by a piece of information which I had from Jack—perhaps I ought to say Lord Chesterton? He said that Reichardt was leaving England at the end of the week, and would not return until the following Spring.

I was immensely relieved at the intelligence; Frankie would soon forget the Hungarian. It would surely be out of sight, out of mind, with her.

We were due at Cowes in a few days, the change of scene would restore Frankie's spirits, even if she missed him at first.

One evening, however, my fears returned. Frankie had slipped out after dinner without saying where she was going or when she would return. It was the very evening that Von Essler was starting for the Continent. The coincidence alarmed me.

To make matters worse Lord Kinross turned up at half-past nine, and looked very glum at Frankie's absence. After waiting about half an hour he asked me straight out where Frankie was.

"I don't know!" I said, trembling.

"Have you no idea?"

I shook my head, a sudden terror seized me. Von Essler was leaving England this evening within an hour or two. Was it possible that Frankie had been mad enough, reckless enough, to make a runaway match with him?

I rushed upstairs to Lady Gaveston's room.

"You must come down and speak to Kinross, he's annoyed that Frankie's out, and is getting impatient and suspicious as to where she is. You must quiet him—you *must*, I say! Get him away, somehow, you can do it. And then——" I paused breathlessly.

"Where is your cousin?" said Milady.

"I—I—oh, Lady Gaveston, won't you help me?" I cried desperately. "I'm afraid for Frankie. She wants to marry Von Essler, and—and—send Kinross away," I pleaded, "but don't let him know about Reichardt!"

Milady rose, a stiff, unbending figure, her inevitable knitting in her hand. "I will see Lord Kinross," she said slowly.

"You won't say anything nasty about Frankie?"

Lady Gaveston stared in frozen astonishment.

"I do not need to be instructed in my duties to your cousin Frances!" she replied. "You forget yourself, Cynthia."

Humbled in pride, but thankful in heart, I followed her downstairs.

"I am sorry Frances has not yet returned," she said. "Did she expect you, Lord Kinross?"

He nodded. "Do you know when she will be back, Lady Gaveston?" he said anxiously.

"That," replied her ladyship, "is somewhat uncertain."

"Pardon me, but do you know where she has gone?"

Lady Gaveston lifted her glasses and stared Lord Kinross up and down. "Mrs. Norton is visiting some friends," she said.

Kinross coloured.

"Forgive me, but——" he paused.

Milady smiled. "Frances is a little heedless at times," she said, "but that is a fault of youth. It was thoughtless of her to go out when you were coming. But"—she stared at him hard—"it is only for thoughtlessness she is to blame."

"Thank you," he said, evidently much relieved; "thank you. I'd better go now, perhaps. I shall see Frankie to-morrow?" Lady Gaveston stepped towards him.

"Yes," she said slowly, "to-morrow you shall see her."

Barely had the door closed on his lordship when Lady Gaveston turned to me.

"Get on your hat," she said quickly, "we are going out."

"Where?" I stammered. "What for?"

Lady Gaveston gave a grim laugh. "We are going to find your cousin Frances," she said. "Make haste!"

(The result of their journey will be told next week. This series began in No. 702 of Short Stories. *Back numbers may be ordered through any newsagent. Readers interested in these revelations should turn to page* 443.)

A Tardy Reckoning.

The Story of a Long Trail.

"No, I'm absolutely certain that there is nothing in it, Lettice—nothing at all! Philip Tracy mayn't be everything that is nice, perhaps, but—so contemptuously unscrupulous as to, underhandedly, and for no apparently, earthly reason, compass my ruin, well—I can't bring myself to believe it; even though it is you that say it is so!"

"Stephen! I tell you Philip Tracy is your enemy. I know it!"

"You?"

"Yes. I!"

"But how?"

"Isn't it sufficient, dear, that I, who of all women, have the best right to fear for you, warn you—just warn you—against a man whom I instinctively dislike and distrust, and who, I am most certainly convinced, is scheming to bring about your undoing?"

"Of course, Lettice, darling! I appreciate your motive. I only suggest that you are, well—that you must be mistaken."

"Tell me, Stephen! Look me between the eyes, and tell me! do you not, in your own mind; and if you rightly interpret your own estimate of Philip Tracy, as a man with whom you have enforced business, and semi-social relations, judge him—much as I judge him—to be false whenever expediency and opportunity appeal to him that it is desirable so to be."

Lettice Orde was a girl who, without being in the least mannish, or ultra up-to-date in her tastes and principles, was sufficiently firm-willed and self-reliant not only to have opinions of her own, but also to have the courage of them.

She was one of the few beautiful women in the world, who, having absolute control of large means, hold it to be a special delight and glory to bestow their good things upon the men of their choice.

But Lettice Orde was more even than this—she was industrially artistic, and worked away at her residential studio in Chelsea, as though her income of eight hundred a year was non-existent, and that her living depended upon a steady output of pot-boilers.

Stephen Borrodaile met her on one of her sketching tours in Brittany, whither he had himself gone for his yearly holiday.

Bank clerks, are sometimes more than mere machines and Stephen Borrodaile was one of the exceptions. He was an artist spoilt, exceptional facilities for getting him into the "Consolidated Bank," together with the immediate necessity of earning, to help support a large family of unprovided-for young brothers and sisters, being responsible for the undoubtedly great mistake.

Lettice and he soon discovered mutual community of tastes, alike in things personal and artistic. She was going on to Paris before leaving for home, and though it made a big inroad in his not unlimited resources, Stephen, in the spirit of protectiveness, travelled with her to the French capital.

The journey was to be the life crisis of both of them.

The characteristic neighbourhood of Savernay had been their meeting-place, and they had, therefore, to reach Nantes before touching the railroad for Paris.

Most people will remember a terrible accident to the mid-day express on this line some half-dozen years ago.

It was midway between St. Pierre and Orleans that the thing happened.

It was suddenly discovered by the terrified occupants of a "wagon-lit" that the carriage was on fire.

Communication with both guard and locomotive was cut off, by reason of the early burning of the cord, while the pace at which the train was running but accelerated the mischief.

Stephen Borrodaile and Lettice were in the carriage immediately next to the one that had taken fire, and it was only when they, and a French lady and gentleman, their companions, were half-choked by the smoke, that Stephen awoke to the danger of the situation.

Briefly, he did a thing which stamped him as a hero in the men's minds, and won for him the more than admiration—the love of the girl whom, but a mere month before, he had not known even to exist.

Everything depended upon a quick setting-up of communication with the locomotive, and Stephen, leaving the carriage by the window, made his way, by means of the footboard, and by a risky clinging to any and every available projection, to the engine.

The train was pulled up, and though seven poor souls in the fatal carriage met their death, the bulk of the passengers, including Lettice, were saved by his timely heroism.

Two years have gone by since then, and it it is not wonderful that the pair should be all-in-all to one another, and that Lettice especially, as shown in the above recorded conversation, should have more than ordinary apprehension and anxiety with regard to her lover's personal interests.

Stephen tried to think it out, after he had left Lettice with some mutual friends, but by the next morning was no nearer to a solution of the warning mystery.

It might have been an hour after the bank was opened that Philip Tracy, standing at the counter, in his capacity of paying-out cashier, had handed to him a cheque for £500, signed by Lettice Orde, a customer of the bank, and countersigned by Caleb Haughton, her trustee.

This double signature was necessary, under the provisions of her father's will, and would continue until Lettice's twenty-fifth birthday. It was an arrangement designed solely for her protection, without any reference to her ability to dispose of her means at will.

"Five hundred pounds!" remarked Tracy, with meaning deliberation. "Are you the payee?"

"No."

The tenderer of the cheque was a short, stout, and somewhat seedily-dressed middle-aged man.

"Then your name is not W. J. Scott?"

"No; my name is Hurd—Thomas Hurd."

"Ah! And you received the cheque, I suppose, in the ordinary way of business from Mr. Scott?"

"Yes."

"What is Mr. Scott?"

"A—a racing man."

"A bookmaker! Well, Mr. Hurd, I shall have to trouble you for your address, and to request you to remain for a moment while I show the cheque to the manager."

It was curious that the man did not betray any signs of alarm or extraordinary interest, such as nine persons out of ten would have done under the circumstances. He merely sat down on a bench, took the day's paper out of his pocket, and was soon deep in the latest turf quotations. In less than five minutes Tracy returned, without the cheque.

"We cannot pay this cheque until certain inquiries have been made."

The man who had presented it did not appear to be so very much astonished at this decision.

"Oh, very well!" he said indifferently. "When shall I call again about it?"

"To-morrow, this time."

"But, excuse me," the man asked, in the way of afterthought, "what's wrong?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, the cheque is a forgery."

"A forgery, eh!"

"Yes. The cheque is one out of Miss Orde's last issued book, but though the body of it is evidently in her handwriting, the two signatures, her own and that of Mr. Caleb Haughton, are palpable forgeries."

"Oh! Then I suppose somebody will have to pay the piper?"

"I think it very likely," said Mr. Tracy, with a sidelong look at Stephen Borrodaile. "Very likely, indeed—good-morning!"

Stephen had promised to take Lettice to the Lyceum that evening, both being devoted admirer's of "Sir Henry."

The usual bank rule which compels attendance 'till the day cash is balanced, was in operation that evening until past seven, so that, by the time he had swallowed a chop and some tea, and driven westward, it was close on the stroke of eight, as he joined Lettice in the box lobby.

The play was *The Lyons Mail*, in which the innocent Lesurgues is dramatically made to ultimately triumph over Dubosc, the thief and murderer.

Lettice seemed strangely moved during the whole of the performance, the great actor's wonderfully sympathetic portrayal of patience under suspicion and accusation, suggesting to her mind disquieting ideas, which, try as she would, she could not shake off. It was Stephen's invariable practice to see Lettice to her door, after such expeditions as the one in question.

A journey by the Underground, a walk from Sloane Square to Hogarth Studios, and the two prepared to say "good-night."

"What's the matter, darling?" Stephen asked her; for her face was white, and she was, for her, absorbedly silent.

"Matter, dear? Oh, nothing!—well—that is—you know what is troubling me."

"That notion about Tracy?"

"Yes; I can't help it, Stephen! The belief is forced upon me that Philip Tracy is playing a game in which he hopes and expects to win the odd trick."

"You must have some good reason, Lettice, for thinking so."

"I have. Does he know of our engegament?"

"I think so—yes, of course he does!"

"Then, being aware of it, what do you think of him for asking me to marry him?"

"He—Phil Tracy ask you to——?"

"Yes, more than once. I have refrained from saying anything to you about it, for fear that it should cause friction between you."

"That was not right of you, dear."

"No, I see now that it was not. But you must forgive me, Stephen. I did it for the best."

"I quite believe that, darling, but——"

"Wait a moment, dear," she interrupted him. "During the past forty-eight hours I have had a cheque stolen from my new book. I have nothing tangible to go on, but it was borne in upon me—irresistibly so—that the stolen cheque and Mr. Philip Tracy are more closely connected in fact than he would, perhaps, care to acknowledge."

"Why, what have I been thinking of!—there is a bother with one of your cheques. It was paid over the counter to-day, and the signatures were disputed by Tracy."

"That must be it, then! It was made out for five hundred pounds, but was unsigned. It was for Laurie, my brother, who sails for Canada next week. Well, Stephen, dear, what was the result?"

"Oh! the man who presented it is to call again to-morrow. But it's strange that the bank haven't communicated with you!"

"Probably they have, but, as you know, I have been out since eleven this morning, and have not been home till now. I shall find a note inside, I dare say."

They were so interested in the subject of their talk that they failed to notice a couple of tall, respectably-dressed men come up from the direction of the King's Road, and halt within a short distance of them.

Stephen had just said "Good-night," and was stooping to kiss Lettice, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Mr. Borrodaile?"

"That is my name; but I will thank you to remove your hand."

"I am afraid that is impossible, now you have admitted your identity."

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps it will be as well for this young lady—Miss Orde, I take it—to get inside the house before I tell you."

"Certainly not!" said Lettice, hotly. "I will stay and hear anything you may have to say to Mr. Borrodaile."

"As you please, Miss," said the new-comer. "Stephen Borrodaile, I arrest you on a warrant for forging and uttering a cheque for five hundred pounds in the names of Lettice Orde and Caleb Haughton."

"Me! forge Miss Orde's na——! why you're mad, man!"

"Mad or sane, sir, you will have to come with me."

"Stephen! I don't understand! Officer, I am Lettice Orde! The money is mine! Mr. Borrodaile is my friend! I order you to let him go!"

"I regret, Miss, that it is impossible. I am acting on warrant, and any statement which you may wish to make in the prisoner's favour, you can do so to-morrow morning at Bow Street."

The other individual now came up, signalled a passing cab, and put Stephen into it.

His last words to poor stricken Lettice were, "I'm begin-

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ning to think you're right, Lettice, after all; and if it should be that Philip Tracy has laid this trap for me, he shall answer to me for it, if I have to wait a lifetime!"

The Picture of the Year.

It is more than two years since Stephen Borrodaile stood in the dock of the New Court at the Old Bailey to answer the charge of forging his own sweetheart's name to a cheque for five hundred pounds.

It was most subtly conceived, this plot to ruin an absolutely innocent man in the opinion not only of his fellows, but in the eyes of the woman he loved.

Not that the schemer reaped anything beyond revenge; the revenge of the unsuccessful pretender. When Philip Tracy presented himself at Hogarth Studios, a month or so after Stephen Borrodaile had been sentenced to two years' hard labour, Lettice would not see him.

"Return Mr. Tracy's card," she said to the commissionaire in charge, "and say, please, that I decline to see him now, or at any other time."

He hung about the neighbourhood for some two or three hours, thinking to waylay her if she came out, but he got tired and went home.

In spite of her rebuff, he called again in about a week, only to be told that Miss Orde had left the Studios and had gone abroad.

From then onward, until the opening day of the Royal Academy two years after, Stephen Borrodaile's conviction, he neither saw nor heard of her.

There had been mysterious talk, for long before the exhibition opened, of a wonderful picture by a Miss Lettice Orde, a young artist, who till now had been unrepresented on the walls of Burlington House.

It was more than hinted that there was a story connected with the picture; that, indeed, it had been painted with a purpose.

Philip Tracy, though caught by the many press references to Lettice's name, was not disposed to attach much importance to current rumours concerning her work.

Still, he felt irresistibly drawn to go and see, and, taking a day's leave from his duties, found himself one of the enormous and fashionable crowd that thronged the rooms.

So big and dense was the throng in front of "Not Guilty," which enjoyed a conspicuous place of honour upon the line, that it was fully an hour before he could shoulder himself into the front rank of viewers.

His first glance at the picture told him that he was in the presence of the accusing spirit.

Three feet by a little more than two in size, the canvas pictured with marvellous dramatic power the sordid interior of the Central Criminal Court.

Not much prominence was given to the legal accessories, human or otherwise; the whole interest being centred in two figures, the one at right angles to the other.

One was a man taking his trial at the bar, the other was also a man, but in the witness-box.

The whole *motif* of the picture lay in the expression of the faces of prisoner and witness. Instinctively the spectator felt that the man giving his evidence should of right be standing in the place of that other, whose evident plea of "Not Guilty" was fully borne out by his upright bearing and look of conscious innocence.

A curious murmuring of many voices around him, caused him to take notice that people were regarding him strangely.

"Most astonishing likeness, isn't it?"

"Wonderful!"

"Might have sat for the face," whispered one art critic to another.

There was certainly but little doubt about it; the witness in the picture and the sallow-faced man leaning with trembling hands on the rail, were assuredly one and the same.

Who was the prisoner?

That was what was exercising people's minds.

Then the drama developed a new and startling interest.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the "Consolidated Bank, Limited," Lord Hempstead, was a notable art connoisseur, and patron; and, of course, made it an inviolable rule to be present at the Academy on the first of May.

A rather stormy board meeting in the City had made him late in arriving in Piccadilly.

Never a man to be easily led away by popular runs after certain pictures or artists, he prepared to go the round in his own way.

Audible comments, however, as he proceeded, drew his attention to the crowded space in front of Lettice Orde's picture.

"Good gracious! why they're absolutely mobbing that man," he said to himself, regarding Philip Tracy with keenly searching eyes.

The latter's back was turned to him, so it was impossible to establish the identity of the man.

By dint of hard, if courteous, pushing, the old nobleman got almost abreast of Tracy, who seemed incapable of stirring from his position.

Then, as if goaded by the not too polite remarks of those behind, and about him, Tracy turned and faced his tormentors.

Self-conviction was stamped upon his face. He could not, for all he was worth, cease from justifying the suspicion of those about him.

"Why, Tracy!" cried the peer in astonishment. "Understood you were sick. Shall expect you to explain this to-mor—— Eh! wait a minute!—stay where you are!—the most extraordinary likeness!—and the other!—why it's poor Stephen Borrodaile to the life! There must be something in this."

"Lord Hempstead," said a woman's voice at his elbow, "if you will permit me, I think I can explain."

His Lordship faced about to see a girl, with the most expressive dark eyes he had ever come across, waiting for his acknowledgment of her presence and of her request.

Hastily glancing at the card she had handed to him, and which he had taken mechanically, he just said in an undertone to the cashier: "To-morrow, at eleven, in my room at the bank," and by a respectful inclination of the head, Lord Hempstead motioned his fair companion towards the entrance hall.

Half-a-dozen sentences, established perfect confidence between them; while across a lunch table at Prince's, Lettice told the story of her life-sorrow, and of all that she had done during Stephen's absence to bring the truth to light.

The trail had been long and weary, for it was only the day before that the last link establishing her lover's innocence and Tracy's guilt had come into her hands.

Time after time she had determined, in sheer despair, to abandon her quest—the intensity of her love for Stephen alone making her to take up the clue again.

"My dear young lady," said Lord Hempstead kindly, and with unfeigned admiration in every tone of his voice, "let an old man say—and mean it when he says it—that for your sake he is more than tempted to wish himself forty years younger. Stephen Borrodaile, in spite of all that he has endured, is to be envied. He must be a very happy man."

"It is good of you to say so, Lord Hempstead. Of course you know that he was released a week ago to-day. He is ill and has gone to Nice, to some friends of mine."

"Poor fellow! But, tell me, what have you discovered?"

She then told him that, through the agency of the commissionaire, at her old Chelsea Studios, she had yesterday been able to find the man, Ephrah Noone, who had paid over the counter the cheque for five hundred pounds.

For a substantial consideration he had revealed every detail in the rascally plan to ruin Stephen Borrodaile, which had proved only too successful.

It seems that Noone had been employed by Tracy to convey a letter to Hogarth Studios on one occasion. While waiting in the corridor for a reply, he picked up an envelope half hidden under the mat outside Lettice's door. It contained a letter to the latter's trustee, Mr. Haughton, and a cheque, filled up for five hundred pounds, but unsigned.

Delivering his find to Tracy, the cashier forged the names both of Lettice and her trustee, arranging with the man Noone to present it. He himself posed as the virtuous detector of crime. Noone swearing at the trial that Stephen had given him the cheque, the proceeds of which he was to hand over to Lettice's lover.

There was now no longer a doubt of Tracy's conspiracy with the shady money-lender's tout No one to bring about Stephen's ruin. This, in addition to Tracy's disquietude in the presence of the picture, made the day of reckoning to be complete and sure.

The bank authorities did not wait for the unlikely—viz., for their cashier's voluntary attendance at St. Swithin's Lane to explain the unexplainable. Before the end of the afternoon of the Academy opening day, a warrant was applied for, care being taken in the meanwhile to secure the person of Ephrah Noone, as that of an important witness.

Late the same night, however, Tracy was arrested at Charing Cross Station as he was about to enter the Boat train.

At the subsequent trial, Noone received a comparatively light sentence, in view of necessary aid given the prosecution. Philip Tracy was sent to penal servitude for ten years.

* * * * *

At the marriage which took place at the British Embassy in Paris three months after Philip Tracy's conviction, Lord Hempstead specially gave the bride away.

Lettice looked not only lovely, but proud and happy. Stephen Borrodaile was as a man who gratefully takes a good gift, but whose heart is too full for words.

The last one to shake them both heartily by the hand, and to wish them "God-speed" as the Southern express left, the "Gare du Nord" was the old lord who firmly believes that Lettice Borrodaile is the only woman in all the world who both could and would have done as she did.

Ralph Enderby.

Rose to the Occasion.

Young Tutter (drawing closer): "I hope, Miss Clara, that your father, in the next room, can't hear what I am saying." Miss Pinkerley (with dignity): "I hope, Mr. Tutter, that you will say nothing to me that you would not be willing, if necessary, to say to papa."

A New Recipe.

They expected the hot weather, and were discussing lemonade. Tommy: "Ah, you should see the funny way that Mr. Smith and Clara make lemonade." Mother: "How, darling?" "Why, Clara holds the lemon, and Mr. Smith squeezes her."

Special Terms to Such Customers.

Hotel Clerk (suspiciously): "Your bundle has come apart. May I ask what that queer thing is?" Guest: "This is a new patent fire escape. I always carry it, so in case of fire I can let myself down from the hotel window. See?" Clerk (thoughtfully): "I see. Our terms for guests with fire-escapes, sir, are invariably cash in advance."

Your Editor Chats.

The new serial romance begins in the next number of *Short Stories*. It is a splendid story—the best of its kind we have ever had—and you will enjoy it thoroughly.

It is cleverly written, full of stirring incident and teeming with dramatic scenes.

And now, I will let you into a secret. Selecting serial stories is by no means an easy task. Although I don't wish to pose as a wondrous worker, yet you may be interested to hear that in my search for a story sufficiently excellent to please my readers, I have read, within the past few months, no fewer than eleven serials, varying in length from 60,000 to 150,000 words. This reading, of course, has to be done in addition to the ordinary work of editing, and most of it was done while the majority of you have been sound asleep.

So I hope that, after all this toil, I have succeeded in getting hold of a story that will please you all. If so, my labours will not have been in vain.

* * * *

Every reader will be interested in the discussion (republished on page 443) which has been going on in a big London Daily about the "Confessions of Cynthia."

* * * *

This week the last picture in the Cut Picture competition appears. Next week we shall hold another competition, complete in itself, of a bright and novel description, in which ten Gramophones will be awarded as prizes.

* * * *

If any reader has been sufficiently interested in the present serial to feel that he or she is justified in distributing a few leaflets about the new story I should be ever so much obliged, and I will gladly forward a small parcel for distribution.

If you decide to help us in this way please send a post-card stating the number you think you can distribute to the Publisher, *Short Stories*, 17—18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

A prize of £5 will be given to the person who distributes these leaflets to what I consider to be the best advantage.

Full particulars will be sent you with the leaflets when you have made your application.

Your Editor.

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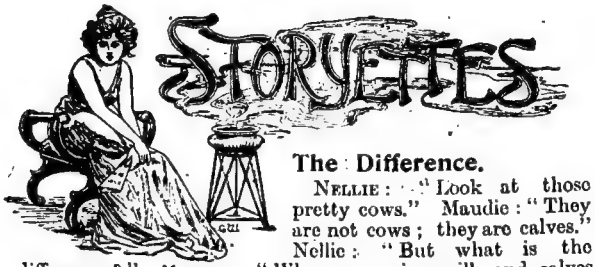

The Difference.

Nellie: "Look at those pretty cows." Maudie: "They are not cows; they are calves." Nellie: "But what is the difference?" Maudie: "Why, cows give milk and calves give jelly."

And George Tried.

Bride: "George, dear, when we reach town let us try to avoid giving the impression that we are newly married." George: "All right, Maud; you can carry this portmanteau."

Very Unkind.

Mr. A.: "Just look at that dolt of a man. What a charming wife he has. How true it is that the biggest fools always marry the prettiest girls." Mrs. A.: "Oh, you flatterer!"

After the Coronation.

"Yes," remarked Mrs. Malaprop, "it was a grand sight. First came the king, carrying a spectre in his hand, and wearing a beautiful red mantle all trimmed with vermin. It was a grand sight."

The Lips of Experience.

Penelope: "I don't like to see you dangling about with mere boys all the time. What do you find that's so interesting in that smooth-faced young Faris?" Perdita: "Why, Pen, his face isn't so smooth as it looks."

Rough on Kidder.

Askins: "Good gracious, Kidder! How came you by that fearful cold?" Kidder: "My wife leaves the window wide open every night when the baby is wakeful, and allows the wind to blow on me becauses it amuses the baby to hear me cough."

John's Mistake.

Husband: "Did you see me kiss my hand to you this morning after I had left the house?" Wife: "Why, John, I wasn't near the window then." Husband: "I wonder who it was?" Wife: "I don't know; but, by the way, John, Mary told me this morning she had decided she would stay with us another month."

A Question of Economy.

"Laura," said the young lady's mother, not unkindly, "it seems to me that you had the gas turned rather low last evening." "It was solely for economy, mamma," the maiden answered. "There is no use trying to beat the gas company, my daughter. I have noticed that the shutting off of the gas is always followed by a corresponding increase of the pressure." "Well, that lessens the waist, doesn't it, mamma dear?" replied the artless girl. And her fond parent could find no more to say.

A Level-Headed Maid.

Day was trembling on the edge of night. The sun had dropped behind the hills, and splashed the sky with red. For two hours Susan and Henry had been talking. Susan was sweet-faced and tender, and the amethystine tints of the evening touched her face softly, and the fading lights threw a halo about her head. He folded her to his throbbing bosom, and then slowly unfolded her. "We shall be so happy," he whispered. "Yes, Henry," was her murmured response, "and so harmonious. Whatever you say I shall believe now, henceforth and for ever." "I can never be such a husband as you deserve, Susan," he almost sighed. "No, Henry," she said, "I suppose not, but at my time of life I can't afford to be too particular. Come in and have some supper." And Henry went in.

Very Much Broken.

"I am a broken man," said the playwright. "So I should think," was the answer, "for I have seen your pieces."

Must be One or the Other.

"Notice that man over there, how nervous he appears, constantly looking round to see if anybody is watching him. I'll bet he's a burglar." "Yes, or a bridegroom."

A Very Good Match.

Mack: "Was the girl Hibee married considered a good match?" Robins: "I imagine so. She fires up at the least provocation."

A Blonde Income.

Clara: "Charlie Jackson prefers blonde girls." Laura: "Indeed. I am quite a brunette, you know, and he is always very attentive to me." Clara: "Probably because your income is fair."

She Got a New Bonnet.

He (indignantly): "Those insulting vergers put us into a back pew." She (calmly as a quiescent volcano): "They probably noticed that I wore a bonnet which I wouldn't care to have seen."

Another Chance Lost.

She: "If it were necessary, and I were your wife, would you go through fire and water for me?" He: "Do you think it would be necessary?" She: "It might." He: "Then I think you had better marry a fireman. Good evening!"

An Inspiration.

"Here are some sultana cakes I made myself," she said. He paled. "Thank you, darling," he faltered, and partook. That night the painter dreamt, whereat he rose, and in feverish haste painted an art poster, which brought a hundred and fifty-two pounds. Then he kissed his wife fondly, called her a brave little woman, and wondered what he would do without her.

Wanted Consolation.

"Don't you give any premiums for twins?" asked an anxious-looking man who had edged his way through the crowd in front of the railing behind which sat the judges at the baby show. "No, my friend," replied one of them. "We have thought it best not to offer premiums for twins. Here is the premium list. You can see for yourself." "I didn't know but you might have a consolation prize to offer," said the anxious-looking inquirer, edging his way out of the crowd again.

Saved in Time.

Wibble: "I hear that young Jinx has broken his engagement with Miss Flyer." Wabble: "Yes; and it's odd the way it happened, too. You see, he left a phonograph at the house, so she could whisper a 'good night' into it just before she turned out the gas, and send it to him through the post. Quite romantic, you see. Well, you see, in the excitement of the affair, she forgot to shut the machine off, and he not only received her words, but a large and varied assortment of snores that had accumulated while she was asleep."

The Modern Yellow-Back.

Farmer Hodge (reading novelette): "I'm out of all patience with that Gladys Fitzallwyn in the story—the way she's abusing her beautiful eyes. She doesn't deserve to have none." Mrs. Hodge: "What's she been doing now?" Farmer Hodge: "This book is full of it. First she threw her eyes up to the ceiling, and then let them drop on the floor; then she darted them down a long corridor, and rested them on the cool waters of the lagoon. Then she must have called them back somehow, for it says she bathed them in sad, salt tears, wiped them, and swept them with long lashes. Once she was fool enough to rivet them on the dome, and when I left off she was fixing them on the mantelpiece."

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The Double Knot.

The Tale of a Boot-Lace Union.

Sybil Farrington had come up to London, bent on that most delightfully feminine enjoyment, known by the name of a day's shopping. She lived with her father, the rector of Fern Dell, a most primitive and rural village in Kent, and a day spent in London was for her a delightful break in the monotonous round of parish work and duties.

Not that Sybil ever felt dull, her bright disposition made her feel happy anywhere, and she was the joy and pride of her father's heart, who called her his ray of sunshine.

Not alone to him did she appear to be a beam of gladsome light, but to all the cottagers of Fern Dell, and no one was ever more popular than she was among young and old. Even Mother Ricket, the most surly and grumpy dame of the parish, would welcome Miss Sybil with a smile when she tripped across the threshold with her pet Irish terrier, Sam, whose popularity bid fair to equal that of his mistress.

Sybil ran down the steps of the Army and Navy stores where she had been shopping rather promiscuously—gloves, veils and ribbons for herself, garden implements for her father, groceries for the old housekeeper, and sundry little commissions for different cottagers—and jumped into a 'bus. She was going to have tea with a former school friend now married and settled in a flat off Baker Street.

"Bother it," she mentally ejaculated, as she noticed that her shoe-lace had got undone for the fourth or fifth time that day. She was firmly wedged in between a gentleman and an old lady and had not much elbow room, still she bent down and set about tying the refractory lace. She gave it several vicious tugs and pulled it into a big black knot determined it should not worry her again by getting loose, and then she sat up with quite a sigh of relief, feeling that this time at any rate she had conquered the nasty stubborn thing, as she phrased it to herself. Then she opened the pages of her favourite paper and was soon deeply immersed in the thrilling details of a love-sick damsel's heart troubles.

Suddenly she felt her foot violently jerked and she looked up rather indignantly thinking her neighbour was both awkward and rude. Well, he was apologising most profusely and was very red in the face, and he looked very ridiculous too, he appeared to want to stand up and yet not know his own mind on the subject. What could be the matter with the man, marvelled Sybil, when she felt her foot jerked again. This was too much.

"Sir," she uttered in the most frigid tones, and was not mollified when she saw by his garb that he was a clergyman.

The unfortunate gentleman turned a deeper shade of crimson.

"Excuse me, madam—but I really wish to get out——"

Sybil raised her eyebrows in astonishment; was the man mad? What hindrance did she bring to bear on his getting in or out, and what could that have to do with his so unduly jerking her foot? But, still murmuring confusedly he went on:

"And er, madam, ahem, the fact is, er—you have, I am sorry to say, tied your shoe-string to mine!"

He jerked out this extraordinary statement in the last stage of confusion, being evidently distressed to inform Sybil of what she had done. But it was her turn now to get rosy red and to look the picture of misery. Good gracious! was such an awful thing possible? She quickly moved her foot, and nearly jerked the unfortunate gentleman over.

By this time the other passengers in the 'bus, who had so far been mute spectators of this drama being enacted in their presence, grasped the gist of the situation, and roars of laughter made the unhappy pair feel they would give anything for the earth to open and swallow them.

"Untie the knot," Sybil whispered imperiously, feeling inclined to vent the vials of her wrath upon his head which, of course, was most unfair as she herself had done the mischief. But Sybil was after all only a woman, and what woman can remain perfectly fair when she is angered? And, poor girl, she did feel terribly hot and miserable over this absurd situation. The young fellow smiled grimly.

"Easier said than done," and he bent down in obedience to her peremptory order.

Alas! Sybil had indeed succeeded this time in making the string into a hard and fast knot, only she had been unfortunate enough to be sitting next to a gentleman whose shoe-laces also had this unfortunate propensity to get loose, and she had tied the two wrong ends.

The gentleman strove and strove, but all in vain, and still the mirth of their fellow-passengers increased. He drew out his penknife.

"Do you mind?" he whispered. "It is the only thing to be done."

"Oh, yes," she answered back in an agonised voice, "cut it, do anything to put an end to this."

He severed the strings at last, as Alexander of old cut the Gordian Knot with his sword when he failed to untie it with his fingers. Hastily lifting his hat he prepared to get down, but Sybil felt she could not remain in this unpleasant atmosphere of mirth for which she had provided the subject, and she too hurriedly left the 'bus. She hailed a hansom and jumping in drove to her friend's house.

She poured forth her tale of woe but found little sympathy. Her cherished friend, dainty and pretty little Mrs. Rivers, actually found it in her heart to send forth a merry peal of laughter.

"Oh, Sybil, do forgive me, dear, but it is so excruciatingly funny! I would have given anything to see you coupled, tied by the leg—oh, no, excuse me, by the foot, to this stranger."

"Oh! Ada, how can you? It is cruel of you! And I feel so miserable, so crushed!"

"Never mind, darling, a cup of tea will revive you. Tell me, Syb, was he young and good-looking, this knight of the shoe-latchet?"

"Ada, it is disgraceful of you to go on so. I never thought you could be so horrid."

"Nonsense, old girl, do not be a goose. Do tell me, was he nice?"

"I am sure I do not know and do not care. I did not look at him even, and hope I shall never lay eyes on the hateful man again!"

"That's a bit hard on the poor chap, you know Sybil After all, you linked yourself to him, not he to you!"

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*
"A FOE IN THE FAMILY,"
Our splendid new serial, starts next week.
*

"He had no business to have his nasty shoe-lace just close to mine; horrid wretch!"

"Oh, come, Syb, you are hard on him! Had he a patent leather shoe? You must have observed that, surely, and at any rate one can always judge if a man is a gentleman by the way he is shod."

"I never looked at his vile shoe, but the man was in the Church, so I suppose he was a gentleman."

"Nonsense, that does not follow. Some parson folks are the biggest cads out!"

Sybil drew herself up with mock dignity to reprove her friend's levity.

"Ada, you forget; I belong to the Church."

"Well, the ritualists do wear petticoats! Still, I thought the female element was not considered quite the thing for ordination. What a jolly thing it would be though, Syb, if you ran up against this parson some time or other, fell in love with one another and had the knot tied, not in a 'bus next time, but before the altar."

"Ada, I am not going to stop here one minute more to listen so your sickening nonsense. Besides, I must be off to catch my train."

* * * * *

"Syb, dear."

"Yes, daddy," and Sybil Farrington looked up over the tea-urn and well-appointed breakfast service to smile at her father, the Rev. Mark Farrington.

"You know I have applied for a curate to help me at least temporarily in my work, as I do not feel quite so young as I used to be."

Sybil jumped up from her place and fondly hugged her father.

"You darling, dad, why you are as young as ever, and fit for more work than half these young fops of curates who think more of their collars than of the parish work."

Mr. Farrington smiled.

"You are rather hard on the youngsters, dear. However, I have just received a letter from a Mr. Cedric Vernon telling me he is taking a holiday from his work in the East End and can come to me for six weeks. That sounds good, and a worker in the East End is not likely to be one of these young, good-for-nothings you anathematize."

"He is a nuisance all the same, daddy, because he will be a very awkward third party and destroy our delightful *solitude a deux*. You and I never feel we want a stranger here, do we, dad, darling?"

"Well, little one, no doubt some day a stranger will come between us, only then you won't think him a stranger."

"Oh, daddy, for shame! As if I ever meant to leave you and marry! What an absurd suggestion!"

Mr. Farrington laughed.

"Why, Syb, the idea of your remaining an old maid is much more absurd!"

"I mean to, though! I can quite fancy myself in a mop-cap, with silver hair and gold-rimmed spectacles. At any rate I shall never marry."

"Yes, dear, all girls say that till Mr. Right turns up!"

"But, there is not a man in the world worth my giving up the dearest of all old dads!"

"Twaddle," responded her father.

"But, daddy, dear, it is not twaddle. I mean it!"

Having thus issued her decree which she thought then to be as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, Sybil stepped out through the open French window on to the lawn which stretched in front of the Rectory as far as the shrubberies which shut off the delightful old-fashioned rose garden. The beauty of the Fern Dell Rectory roses was celebrated all over the county.

Sybil called "Sam, Sam," and immediately the dog came bounding towards her holding in his mouth a basket in which lay a pair of garden scissors. Sybil had long since trained him to bring her these every morning after breakfast, ere she started on her rounds to pluck the supply of flowers with which she loved to deck every room in the house.

The girl knelt on the green sward, as she took the basket from the dog, and throwing her arms around his shaggy neck she kissed him.

"Dear old Sam, just fancy you and I are not going to have the grounds all to ourselves any more. That horrid curate is sure to be always sauntering about where he is not wanted. I dare say he will smoke too! Ugh, it is disgusting!"

Sam wagged his tail and quite seemed to understand all about the advent of this trouble—some curate which so worried his mistress.

* * * * *

"Syb," said Mr. Farrington a few days later, "Mr. Vernon is to arrive this afternoon at Sunly station; would you mind driving over in the dog-cart to meet him?"

"Oh, daddy, of course I mind very much. I hate it. I know I am going to dislike that man intensely."

"Child, do not be so unreasonable. Besides, you are incapable of disliking any one!"

"Oh, but dad, you do not know me. I could find it in my heart to hate people. I really could!"

And she tried to flash her lovely blue eyes in a most vindictive manner, and only succeeded in looking bewitchingly pretty.

"Will you please remember little spitfire, that Mr. Vernon is coming at my request to help me in my work, and that as my guest, I wish my daughter to treat him with every possible courtesy."

"Yes, dad, I'll do anything to please you."

"Even going to meet him, as I feel rather tired and you would be rendering me a service by going?"

"All right, then. And I shall promise to behave beautifully! There now, are you satisfied?"

A couple of hours later, Sybil drove up to Sunly station to meet the London train. She looked particularly sweet and fresh in a white tailor-made dress and a large white straw hat with roses crowning her halo of golden hair, Sam too accompanied her and trotted at her heels.

"Sam, old boy, I wonder what sort of a fellow he is," she muttered. "At any rate this is such a quiet station, it will be easy to spot him in his parson's rig"—and followed by her trusted companion she paced up and down the platform till the train steamed in.

A tall, dark, very good-looking young fellow jumped out who in his shovel hat and clerical tie was unmistakably the man. Sybil went up to him. "Mr. Vernon, I believe, my father being unavoidably prevented from coming to meet you, asked me to do so and——"

Sybil stopped; as she spoke the stranger turned his eyes full on her, and she recognised the gentleman of the shoe-lace episode. She flushed hotly and, in the wildest confusion, thought of turning her back on him and flying. Alas! such a course was not to be thought of. He was the first to recover his composure, and smiling mischievously:

"Miss Farrington, I am afraid this meeting is for you most unexpected and disagreeable. I am sorry, but cannot well help it! To me, it is unexpected, but"—he hesitated and added in a lower tone—"most certainly not disagreeable."

Sybil bowed stiffly, but not one of her features relaxed in a smile as she said coldly:

"We had better drive back. My father is waiting for you, and"—she went on viciously, determined to punish him for the impertinence of his personality, for which, poor man, he was certainly not responsible, "your business is with him, and not with me!"

"Oh, come, Miss Farrington, please do not take up this hostile attitude towards me, it will make things so uncomfortable for you and for me, and you know we are going to live in the same house for two months."

"Oh, no, there is no necessity for this. I can go and visit one of my friends during that time."

"You shall do nothing of the sort, Miss Farrington."

"Indeed, and who shall prevent my doing what I wish, pray?"

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"I shall, most certainly."

"You!" and there was a touch of scorn in her voice.

"Yes, simply by wiring to Mr. Farrington that I am sorry to find I cannot help him in his work as had been settled."

"Oh, you would not do that," and Sybil thought of the nice rest which the advent of the curate meant for her father.

"Most certainly I shall, if I find that my coming drives you away from your home."

"Well, I shall not go, but you must not disappoint my father. He has not been at all well lately, and he wants rest so badly."

Her voice softened with infinite sweetness when she spoke of her father, and Cedric noted how different she was so.

"I shall not disappoint your father, Miss Farrington, and I can promise I shall do all in my power to lighten the burden of church and parish work from his shoulders."

"Oh, thank you," and Sybil looked up and smiled for the first time, and then he saw how exquisitely fair her face was when so lit up.

"Miss Farrington, won't you forgive me? You know, it was not my fault—what happened the other day," he jerked out awkwardly.

Sybil frowned; this was rather too bad of him to revert to that hateful subject again.

"Come, the trap is waiting," she said shortly.

They left the station together and took their seats in the dog-cart; Sybil, gathering the reins in her hand lightly, touched the cob's side with her dainty little whip more used as an ornament than for any other purpose.

They sped down the village street in silence. Sam lay at their feet. Suddenly he raised himself, and put his nose right into Cedric's hand, looking up most confidingly into his face with his big brown eyes.

"Good old dog, why you are trying to make friends with me."

"More amiable than I am?" the spirit of mischief in Sybil prompted her to say.

"Excuse me, Miss Farrington, I made no rude insinuations; I am never rude."

"Meaning that I am!"

"Well, you said so, not I. Did I, my friend doggie?" And he stooped and patted Sam's shaggy head to the animal's evident delight.

"I can't think why Sam is so friendly to you; he hardly ever makes up to strangers."

"Yes, I suppose you do think it is marvellous how any living thing can be friendly to me."

Sybil laughed. "Oh, come, it is my turn to say I made no such unkind insinuations."

"Well, there's one thing, I have Sam's friendship if I cannot get yours."

"Is it not sufficient?"

"Most certainly not," he said, changing his light bantering tone for a more serious one. He sought her eyes.

"Miss Farrington, I never can bear to be at war with anyone, much less a lady. Do let us be friends."

"Nonsense, of course we shall be friends, if only to please my father. He would be very cross with me if he knew I had been so rude to you."

"Could anyone be cross with you?"

Sybil ignored this altogether, but somehow she began to feel that she must appear in a most ridiculous light, showing all this unfair resentment for the absurd shoe-lace incident. She could not help realising how thoroughly gentlemanly and good-humoured he was over it all. She was impulsive in all her moods and she now turned towards him.

"Please forgive me, Mr. Vernon, I have been so abominably rude to you, and you must think me horribly unreasonable and bad tempered."

"Well, I should not like to tell you what I think of you."

"Really, is it so bad?"

"No," he said slowly and deliberately, "but it might make you feel conceited."

Sybil blushed, but somehow she had ceased to feel angered with him.

"Miss Farrington!"

"Yes?"

"As we are really going to be friends now, won't you give me a token of this new friendship?"

"Well, it depends on what the token is," and her merry blue eyes looked laughingly up into his.

"You were so angry at the station when you discovered who I was, that you never even shook hands with me. Would you do so now?"

"What, and leave hold of Dolly's reins and give her the chance of bolting?"

"I shall see to that," and masterfully taking the reins from her, he gathered them into his left hand, and held out his right to her. She put hers into his, rather wondering inwardly at her docile meekness to his unreasonable demands. He clasped her hand in his in a strong grip.

"Now this seals the compact of our friendship, does it not?"

Sybil did not meet his eyes; there seemed to be a nervous flutter at her heart which she did not understand. She whispered, "Yes."

He immediately released her hand, and keeping possession of the reins.

"You are tired, you had better let me drive for the rest of the way."

She let him have his own way and the drive was after this more or less a silent one, except when Sybil gave him the necessary directions about the way. When they turned in at the Rectory gate, they found Mr. Farrington on the lawn to welcome them.

* * * * *

It was the old, old story, and what is bound to follow when two young folks are much thrown together, and when their tasks and pleasures lie in the same path. Cedric and Sybil visited the poor together, and played tennis and ping-pong when he was free from his clerical duties. The eloquence of his sermons touched her more than any had ever done before, not even excepting those of her darling father. Mr. Farrington soon guessed the true state of things, but he felt happy. His beam of sunshine would indeed pass from his life, but he loved her too unselfishly to wish to keep her when her love had gone out to a true, good man such as he knew young Vernon to be. Still, they had never spoken to each other and the two month's stay of the young curate was drawing to a close. Sybil could not bear to think that a time would come when he would no longer be with them.

One morning when she sallied from the breakfast room with Sam and the rose basket, Cedric stepped after her.

"May I be allowed to accompany you and hold the basket?"

"Certainly."

A happy light danced in her eyes, as they wandered toward the old-world rose garden. Sam barked and frisked about, but the young people got far too much absorbed in each other to notice poor old Sam. They entered the arbour which was a perfect wealth of crimson ramblers and honeysuckle. The fragrance filled the air; the birds twittered among the trees, and the sun's rays slanted down on the face of the old sun-dial to mark the speed of passing time. But they took no heed of all these things as they sat down on the old stone bench under the roses. Sybil felt strangely embarrassed, and yet her heart seemed to overflow in a new-found happiness.

"Sybil!" He had never called her by her name before. "I shall be going back to London soon; will you miss me just a little?"

She did not answer, but a lump seemed to rise at her throat, and silently the mist gathered in her eyes. He was quick to notice this.

"Sybil, darling, is this so, do you really care so much? Is it possible that I have won that pearl beyond price, a good woman's love?"

"Oh, Mr. Vernon, I am not good at all; it is you who are so far removed above me. I am not worthy of being loved by you."

A Grand New Competition Starts Next Week.

DON'T MISS IT!!!

"My darling, how can you talk so?" and slipping his arm around her, he drew her to him till her fair head rested on his shoulder. Gently, almost reverently he pressed his lips to hers.

"Sybil, I love you. Tell me, sweet one, dare I hope that you care for me a little?"

She did not answer but nestled closer to him, feeling safe and happy by his side, as if no harm could ever come to her now; she felt secure in this great and noble love.

"Sybil, won't you tell me that you love me?"

"Oh, Mr. Vernon, you know I do."

"Sweetheart," and again he kissed her, "don't call me that horrid, stiff and formal Mr. Vernon. To you now and for ever I must be Cedric."

"It seems so strange to call you so," she murmured shyly.

"Well, Syb, darling, but it won't after a time. Surely you do not intend all your life through to call your husband Mr. Vernon," and he laughingly pinched her rosy cheek.

"Oh, you are a naughty, bad man," she replied with feminine inconsistency, all the time believing him in her heart to be the noblest and best of men.

"Well, but I want you just to say once, Cedric, I love you!"

She hid her head on his shoulder, but murmured very low, "Cedric, I love you."

"My darling! Look here, Syb, I want you to promise me something."

"What is it, Mr. Vernon—no, I mean, Cedric?" As she read the reproof in his eyes.

"You are solemnly to pass your word of honour you will never again tie your shoe-lace to any strange gentleman's whom you may happen to meet in the 'bus."

"Oh, Cedric, for shame! How can you?"

"How can I? Oh, quite easy, thank you. It will be a most delightful occupation to tease my sweet little wife!"

* * * * *

When Mr. Farrington heard of the engagement, he had the generosity not to remind Sybil of her rash vow about never marrying, and all things were arranged to the satisfaction of everyone when it was decided that Cedric Vernon should remain at Fern Dell Rectory as Mr. Farrington's permanent curate, as the work, he declared, was really far too much for him nowadays.

Sybil was supremely happy in this thought of living with these two whom she loved better than all else on earth.

When Mrs. Rivers was apprised of Sybil's engagement to a clergyman, she briefly wrote back: "Darling, Syb, let me congratulate you. Is the happy man the knight of the shoe-latchet? Something tells me it must be he. Wire back 'yes' or 'no.' Yours fondly, Ada Rivers."

Sybil telegraphed laconically, "Wretch," and Mrs. Rivers rested content that her random surmise was right.

Lily Butler.

NURSERY NEWS.

This is the title of an eight-page magazine for Children, which will in future be given away every week with *Pearson's Weekly*.

100 Prizes for Children every week

No. 1 of NURSERY NEWS will be found in the issue dated October 9th.

A BOON AND A BLESSING.

It has been remarked that the babies who are born in this age show greater wisdom than any ever born in the past, inasmuch as they have selected the golden age of babies.

Never before was known such ornate rattle-boxes, such successful teething rings, such satisfactory remedies for small interior pains, such ambrosial artificial food!

And now, with it all, comes the invention of Mr. Thomas Phipps, though we do not know that this is not more for the parent than for the baby. It must, however, prove a great boon to both.

It appears that Mr. Phipps is the father of a healthy and vigorous baby. This baby, like many others, delights in nothing so much as walking with his parent through the still hours of the long night, the parent, of course, being the active party to the pedestrianism.

Three months ago Mr. Phipps determined to devise some sort of odd mechanical means for doing his work. He fully recognised the many difficulties in the way of this, the chief of which he conceived to be, as his experiences proved, the crafty and suspicious mind of the infant himself, then some three months old.

Naturally Mr. Phipps's first idea was to make a steam-man to take the place of himself in the nocturnal pedal exercises. After a month of hard work he succeeded in making this sort of a man, and the first trial was fairly satisfactory. He experienced considerable difficulty in getting a lifelike expression on the wax face, but finally succeeded.

The great difficulty, however, was in guiding the automaton properly, and after the second night he insisted on falling over the furniture to such an extent that Mrs. Phipps would no longer allow him to be trusted with her offspring.

Accordingly Mr. Phipps abandoned the idea, and began working on slightly different lines. The result is the Phipps' Patent Panoramic Baby Walker. Mr. Phipps had become convinced that it was not so much travel as the appearance of travel which was demanded by the infant mind.

He now erected wire framework, somewhat resembling the "dummies" seen in front of ready-made clothing shops, which are sometimes mistaken by near-sighted people for our gilded youth.

By ingenious machinery in the cellar, which was connected with the figure through a hole in the floor, Mr. Phipps succeeded in giving it the exact motion incident to walking.

He then cried "Eureka!" in a loud voice, and placed the child in the arms of the figure, which he had fittingly clothed in white.

But it appeared that he had in his own words "eurekaed too soon," for what was his surprise when the child cried and refused to be comforted. He soon saw the trouble; the intelligent infant had got his eye on a picture of "Cæsar Crossing the Rubicon," which hung on the wall, and by this told that he was not moving at all.

Mr. Phipps was again baffled. He took the little treasure and walked on with him through the dark hours; but Mr. Phipps' mind was not inactive the while. Mr. Phipps saw that what was lacking was the moving panorama idea.

He accordingly mounted an endless strip of scene canvas on upright rollers. This he painted with the same pattern as the wall paper, and on it hung the picture of "Cæsar Crossing the Rubicon."

On the other side he placed a panorama of the opposite wall, with its picture of the Houses of Parliament.

He then arranged the figure to turn quickly every ten seconds, adjusted the infant, let on the steam in the cellar, which started the figure and the panoramas, and watched the result.

The child felt the swinging, rise-and-fall, lean-over-and-sway-back motion of the figure, saw Cæsar go past on the Rubicon' felt the turn, observed the Houses of Parliament roll past in fitting sequence, and closed his eyes and went to sleep.

Mr. Phipps crept into bed and enjoyed the first night's rest in five months. He expects to have his machines on sale shortly.

P. L. A.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Are They Proper Reading?

A Discussion in a Big London Daily.

On Thursday, September 4th last, a letter appeared in the London DAILY NEWS on the subject of "Is the Middle-Class Decadent?" After putting forward several arguments in the affirmative, the writer, signing himself "Verax," goes on to prove to his own satisfaction that one of the surest signs of decadence in the middle classes is the manner in which they appreciate articles that tell of the doings of the Upper Classes. He says:

What is the case to-day? "The Visits of Elizabeth," already discussed, Sir, in your columns, following on "Dodo" and "The Massarenes," has been followed up by a crowd of kindred books, all painting the roses and raptures of aristocratic vice, and now we find in the weekly periodical output of one of our journalist princes (we have no merchant princes now), a publication called SHORT STORIES, which has as its leading item a series of revelations entitled "The Confessions of Cynthia." This series, be it noted, is appearing in a publication which appeals solely to the middle class. It has as its central figure an adventuress, whom the author shows to be thoroughly unscrupulous and to move "in the highest circles," a very type of "smart set" wickedness. The editor refers in his paper to the interest displayed by his readers in this lady, whose doings, it is but fair to say, are chronicled with a force and clearness worthy of a higher model.

Now, what is the sadly significant fact about this? Not that the art of the fictionist is used to expose misconduct, but that in a purely middle-class journal the vices of the aristocracy should prove an attraction, vices which our forefathers reprobated and would not tolerate.

This letter was followed on September 5th by another epistle, defending the famous series of articles. It ran as follows:

SIR,—The point raised by your correspondent "Verax" regarding the series of articles entitled "The Confessions of Cynthia," now appearing in SHORT STORIES, is of great interest to me. I am one of the middle class to whom "Verax" refers, and know nothing about the way in which people in high society live. The articles in question considerably opened my eyes as to the real way in which the very wealthy pass their lives. I had been under the impression that wealthy people were supremely happy, and spent all their time in pleasure. I had no idea that money troubles ever worried them, consequently my own unhappiness resulting from comparative poverty was greatly intensified. After reading, however, of the misery and wretchedness of the adventuress and other characters in this series, I have realised that money is far from being everything, and consequently I am no longer eaten up with envy for the wealthy. I do not think it fair of "Verax" to deprecate the publication of this kind of literature. If vice and misery exist amongst the upper classes why should it be kept a dark secret from the middle classes? Yours, etc.

MIDDLE CLASS.

Following this were two or three further letters, including one from a school teacher:

SIR,—The point "Verax" raised concerning the depraving influences of cheap literature sold to hundreds and thousands of our young people to-day is very important. We are often asked to congratulate ourselves because the penny dreadfuls of the "Dick Turpin" type have been superseded by so-called "pure literature." But this pure literature is in some respects worse than the old blood-curdling romance. It casts a false and vicious glamour over a mode of life just as evil, and, alas! more real than that of the highwayman hero. Young girls who need this literature are taught to regard riches, a fine house, and a handsome husband as the sole aim of their existence. There is nothing in these so-called pure works to teach them that life has duties and responsibilities which must be faced, and that a time comes when a girl must put away childish things. "The Confessions of Cynthia," to which "Verax" alludes, is only one of many hundred productions which I find my pupils excitedly perusing, with the result that good literature, that perennial source of spiritual strength and pleasure without alloy, is a sealed book to them, for once a bad literary taste has been formed, the beauties of great writers can never be appreciated.

This point, I think, should receive attention. I am well aware that no law and no censor can regulate books, but let us at least recognise that there is nothing "pure" or beneficent in these cheap productions, which are still vicious and enervating, although they do not chronicle crimes of violence.—Yours, etc.,

TEACHER.

This violent attack on the morals of the series then brought forth a letter from the author of the series herself.

SIR,—It is a good rule that keeps the author silent under criticism; but when that criticism challenges the author's morality, and asperses her motives, it is but fair she should be heard in her own defence.

The correspondents who have referred to "The Confessions of Cynthia" do me great injustice. Whatever else may be said of the "Confessions" it is most certainly untrue that they cast "a false and vicious glamour over a bad mode of life." My aim throughout has been to show that a woman with beauty and talent, with friends in high places, with all the advantages that wealth can bestow, but a woman of no good aims, comes in the end to ruin.

Is this a decadent or an immoral purpose? If so, Thackeray, the great middle-class satirist—who wrote, be it noted, of the upper classes, was decadent and immoral also. Writing of Becky Sharp he says, "All her lies and her schemes, all her selfishness and her wiles, all her wit and her genius, had come to this bankruptcy." It is with great diffidence that I dare to mention Thackeray when writing of my own work; but this I may say, whether the adventuress I portray is a "high" or "low" model, she is taken straight from life. I have studied her at first hand and the career that I am outlining is, as you know, sir, one straight from life. As such I claim it has a special value.

The mistake my critics make is one of great importance. They imagine that a portrayal of vice is immoral, in that it excites sympathy with the vicious. That is not so. The art and aim of the fictionist is to-day the same as in the days of Shakespeare. "To hold the mirror up to nature, to show vice its own image, the very form and body of the age.'

If it is true that the "smart set" count for so much to-day, surely the sooner they are known for what they are the better. And as one who has had the *entrée* to that circle, I have used my humble powers of narrative to show them in their true colours. Yours, etc.,

THE AUTHOR OF "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."

Out of Great Tribulation.

By Henry Farmer.

"Seaton Revelle, consider yourself under arrest."

"To the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

A greyness stole across Revelle's face, as he still stared down at the words; a greyness that seemed reflected on Benny's features now.

"And what, Benny, are your plans for the future?"

With the words, Revelle shifted the blotting paper. The rest of what was written was visible now.

Benny sprang to his feet, hurried across to the table.

"Excuse me, Marquis!" he stammered, his face the colour of ash, "but that—that letter's private and confidential—to a friend of mine!"

He tried to snatch away the letter; but Revelle was too quick. With one hand he pushed him back; the other hand he spread out upon the letter itself.

"Tell me, Benny," he said in a low, strained voice, "since when has the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard, been a friend of yours?"

Benny took a backward step and clutched at his collar.

Revelle cast a quick glance down at the letter.

"I see," he went on, his eyes riveted now on the other's face, "that I am mentioned in your letter—'Seaton Revelle, *alias* the Marquis, planned the robbery!'"

Outside the two men were watching the window.

"Winton," whispered Crump, staring at the two shadows that were now visible on the blind, "this is very tantalising, is it not? So near, and yet so far! If I might jump at conclusions from the attitudes of those shadows, the conversation is of a very serious if not strained nature. The smaller shadow's attitude betrays fear and surprise; the taller one's attitude is to me menacing. It looks to me like a row, and a serious row!"

Within the room, a moment's silence had followed Revelle's words. Benny's teeth were chattering. His right hand stole from his throat to one of his coat pockets, where a revolver nestled.

Revelle realised the meaning of the movement.

"You hound!" he hissed. "You mean to sell me!"

Only an old woman in the house, and she—had not Benny said so?—was as deaf as a post.

It was the instinct of self-defence that had made Benny feel for his revolver. Those words, "The man who sells me will be signing his death-warrant at the same time!" were ringing in his ears.

"Stay where you are, Marquis, or by——"

The revolver was out of his pocket, but before he could bring it up level Revelle had leapt, had closed with him, one hand round his throat, the other gripping his revolver-wrist. Then, tightening his clutch round his throat, Revelle forced Benny backwards on to the table. Physically Benny was no match for him. He could only writhe in noiseless impotence, his face darkening, his eyes glaring up with a frightful expression of horror in their depths.

Then Revelle wrenched the revolver from him.

"Sell me, would you?" he hissed. The working of his livid face told that the barriers of self-control were broken down.

It had all happened in far less time than it has taken to describe.

"It does very much look like a row, Winton! Great Heaven!"

As Crump was whispering the words the two shadows seemed to become one. The double shadow swayed for a moment, then bent over the table. The next second the one shadow became two again. A shadow arm, the hand gripping something, rose and fell twice with a terrible rapidity. Then the shadow tragedy ceased. The light in the room had been extinguished.

Crump's brain had worked at lightning speed. If not murder, frightful mischief had been done. It would be impossible to gain access to the house without raising the alarm, either by knocking on the door or ringing, or breaking into the room through the window.

"Winton, get round to the back entrance!" whispered the little man. "Quick, leave the front door to me!"

Crump unbuttoned his coat. A police whistle was slung round his neck. What had happened meant a complete alteration of his plans. Winton had hurried off!

Click!

Crump glided swiftly through the garden-gate. The front door was being silently opened. A dark figure noiselessly and hurriedly issued.

Crump straightened up and barred the way.

"Seaton Revelle, *alias* James Balder, *alias* Signor Balderini, consider yourself under arrest!"

The figure reeled back. Crump's rather long-winded speech had been intentional. It had had the effect of a blow.

The next moment, the police-whistle jammed between his teeth, he was blowing a screaming note! And, as he blew, he flung himself upon Revelle.

The staggering words, the shrill scream of the whistle, had momentarily paralysed Revelle. He had left Benny in the dark room within, lying on the floor, his skull battered in with the butt of his own revolver. He had fancied himself rid of the man who would have sold him; fancied that there would be time to realise money on the stolen jewels, and get clear of the country before suspicion would fall upon him.

But the paralysis that fettered him was only momentary.

He grappled with Crump, and a second later was fighting like a desperate tiger, fighting to save his neck from the rope. He must get away, if it meant killing another man—the man who had twined his arms round him, who, though he battered down murderous blows on his down-bent head, was holding on with the grimness of death!

Revelle, in the prime of his life! Crump, who would never see sixty again! Yet the little grey-headed man had a lion's heart, and for all the blood streaming down and blinding him, he held on with a grip of steel!

Voices, footsteps were sounding out in the distance. Lights flashed from houses; windows were flung up.

Yet Revelle could not break away from the old man's grip. He tore, bit, and tripped in his horrible frenzy of desperation. It meant the rope, the hangman's rope for him!

He had smashed Crump down on to his knees; twice he drove his clenched fist into his face; but the iron grip of the old man's arms still held him!

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God bless you, Crump, for that grip! You have conquered, and your task is well-nigh done!

A rush of men, some helmeted. A babel of voices that swallows up the sharp snap of the handcuffs. Only then Crump relaxes his grip, and reels back, and is caught in a policeman's arms unconscious!

They took him handcuffed to the nearest police-station, Scatch Revelle, *alias* the Marquis, *alias* Signor Balderini, murderer, thief, and coward!

They bore Crump into the house. Doctors were sent for. In the room on the ground floor they found Benny Beard lying on the ground, his skull battered, but still breathing! Whilst one doctor attended to him, another bandaged up Crump's wounded head, and administered restoratives. The little man was scarcely recognisable; but it was not long before he recovered consciousness.

"Where's Winton?" he murmured.

The inspector stepped to his side.

"Revelle safely in custody?"

"Yes. But you——"

"Never mind me, Winton! The Normanhurst jewels will be found in the strong-room at the Hotel Royal. You had better get out a warrant for the arrest of Masters!"

The little man had spoken with difficulty, but the next moment he raised himself into a sitting position.

"And Faversham?"

"He's alive," whispered the inspector, "but the doctor says he's under sentence of death!"

Crump staggered to his feet, and stood for a moment, swaying like a drunkard.

"Winton, I should—should be obliged to you for the assistance of an arm. Things have gone altogether differently from what I expected. Thank you, Winton! Let us go to the dying man!"

They had carried Benny upstairs and laid him on a bed. They were moistening his lips with brandy when Crump was assisted into the room. Presently his eyelids flickered, then opened.

"Have you got him—the Marquis?" he breathed out faintly.

Crump and Inspector Winton were beside the bed now.

"Yes!" answered the little man.

Then he bent down over the bed.

"Benny," he whispered gently, "play the man, and make a clean breast of it—for the sake of an innocent man and the woman who loves him!"

"Yes, yes!" he whispered almost inaudibly. "Quick—for God's sake—write down what I'm going to say. I'm—going fast; but I can't die—with that on my soul! Brandy."

More brandy, and the dying man's vitality temporarily flickered up.

"I meant to have made—a—clean breast of it. I had written it down, but the Marquis will have destroyed it. Masters got rid of the stuff for us; but you'll find three of the diamonds in my watch-case. Oh, my God! Those dark eyes of hers! I knew that you'd never win your bet, Marquis!"

His mind was wandering; but, presently, consciousness again returned. In a hoarse whisper, sometimes scarcely audible, and speaking so slowly that it was possible to write down every word, he breathed out his confession. Nothing was left untold.

"I can face my God with an easier conscience now," he murmured, as with a shaking hand he scrawled a dying man's signature across the paper, "if I hadn't been a coward, I should have owned up long before. I—I should have liked to—have seen her. I—I should have liked to have looked into her eyes—and seen forgiveness there. Ask her—Esther—to forgive me my share!"

When next he spoke, he was wandering in his mind, imagining he was at Warham, taking part in the village concert, and once he broke out into song—"Oh, when I was single, oh, then." Then they gathered from his babblings that he fancied that he was standing before a judge, in the prisoner's dock, pleading for mercy.

Where Electricity Failed.

A young lady named Lucy Ann Weasenham, living in Third Terrace, Hope Street, Grimsby, was ordered by a doctor to have slight electric shocks daily with a view to cure her of anæmia, weakness, and St. Vitus's Dance. The treatment failed to cure, but Chas. Forde's Bile Beans, which were then tried, succeeded. To a *Grimsby Gazette* reporter Miss Weasenham said:—Anæmia so reduced me and robbed me of strength that I could not lift a cup! St. Vitus's Dance followed, and I was in a shocking plight. It was all due to excessive weakness, and when the electric treatment failed we turned, as a last hope, to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans. A course of this wonderful vegetable preparation brought renewed life to me. The anæmia left me, and as my nerves were strengthened the convulsive movement of my limbs ceased. My appetite improved, my strength returned, and in a few months I was once more restored to health." Bile Beans are a certain cure for anæmia, debility, indigestion, "summer-end fag," loss of appetite, all female ailments, constipation, piles, and headache. Of all chemists at one shilling and three-halfpence or two and nine, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119, London Wall, E.C., upon receipt of prices. Avoid all imitations.

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(No. 455.)

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PRICE ONE PENNY.

"Guilty, your Lordship! Guilty!" he whispered. "But have mercy, have mercy!"

And with these pleading words still clinging to his lips, Herbert Giles, *alias* the Tinker, *alias* Benny Beard, *alias* Mr. Faversham, crossed the threshold of Eternity.

For some little time a solemn silence reigned in the chamber of death. Then one of the doctors approached Crump.

"You ought to get to bed!" he whispered. "You are not in a fit state to be about!"

The little man, his head and face bandaged, was supporting himself again on Winton's arm. One eye alone was visible. He shook his head.

"There is still work to be done! Winton, you will see to matters here, I know. Railton should be arrested at once. Would one of you be good enough to hail me a cab!"

The doctor remonstrated with him; but the little man only shook his head, and remarked with a shadowy smile that he was remarkably tough for an old fellow, and that the gruelling he had received, severe though it was, would certainly not deter him from doing what was a sacred duty.

Having assisted him into a cab, Winton asked the little man where he wished to be driven to.

"The Hotel Royal!"

The cab rattled away.

"At last," said Crump to himself, "the end is in sight!"

JOY DOES NOT KILL.

It was late when Crump reached the Hotel Royal, and the uniformed porter stared hard at the strange, bandaged, dishevelled little man who ascended the steps none too steadily.

"Now, then," he said roughly, "you've made a mistake. This is an hotel, not hospital. And you—at your time of life! You ought to know better!"

"Young man, curb that tongue of yours. I'm fully aware that this is an hotel, and I am going in. Nor am I intoxicated. Appearances are sometimes deceitful."

"Here, don't lecture me! You don't go inside until you tell me your business!"

"I wish to see Mr. Mansfield. Be good enough to see that this card is delivered to him at once!"

The porter huffily took the card. A few moments later John Mansfield himself hurried into the entrance hall. Crump rose with some difficulty from the chair in which he had installed himself.

"Penworthy—Crump!" gasped the banker. "Great Heavens! But what has happened?"

"Good news, Mr. Mansfield!" cried the little man, his one visible eye twinkling like a star. "Good news! Before a week is out, Alec Scarsdale will be a free man!"

"Thank God!"

And the banker was violently wringing one of Crump's hands, the tears standing out in his eyes.

"But you? What's happened? You're injured?"

"Never mind me! Miss Mansfield!"

"Come!" cried the banker.

"Yes! But would you mind if I took your arm? I am—I am suffering from slight giddiness."

Esther had not retired to bed, but sat alone in the private sitting-room that her father had engaged. She was reading through again the pencilled note that she had received earlier in the evening, the note that Crump, for all the strain and anxiety upon him, had found time to send her. Her eyes were upon the words, "The end is looking very much nearer now. Courage, my dear young lady," when the door opened.

Her father entered. The look on his face made her spring to her feet with a low cry! She had read something in his eyes.

"Father?"

She only saw him, was not conscious of the little figure in the background, very much bandaged and leaning for support against the doorway. Crump's one visible eye was dim now.

"Father?"

"Yes," choked out the banker, and stretched out his arms.

A moment later he had folded his child in his arms.

A woman's cry of joy; a man's choking sob; then a silence.

Crump still stood on the threshold, his one eye shedding tears; then he quietly stole away.

"This is no place for me!" he whispered to himself.

He had reached the end of the corridor, when he staggered very badly indeed, and when, a few moments later, John Mansfield, missing the little man to whom everything was owed, hurried out in search of him, he found Crump lying in the corridor unconscious!

* * * * *

Convict 35 looked up wearily as his cell door was flung open. They had sent him back from the prison infirmary as fit again for punishment diet and punishment labour.

His fetters clanked as he rose mechanically to his feet, and stood to attention. His grey eyes had lost their lustre now. There was a pathetic bend about his head, with its grey hairs. Nothing surprised him now. He merely stared dazedly at the little group of men, headed by the governor of the gaol, who had entered. Perhaps they had come to tell him that he was about to be transferred to some other prison; but nothing mattered now.

He was vaguely conscious of the fact that the governor held some papers in his hand.

"Alec Scarsdale," he said, and Scarsdale was vaguely surprised at being addressed, not by his number, but by his name, "Alec Scarsdale, I have good news for you!"

A shadowy, weary smile played round the corners of Convict 35's mouth.

"Owing to certain revelations, it has been proved that you are innocent of the charge on which you have been imprisoned, and I have the pleasure to inform you that His Majesty has been graciously pleased to grant you a free pardon!"

Free pardon, forsooth, for a man who was innocent, who had done nothing, who had suffered the tortures of the wicked—but let it pass! These things, in time, will pass away!

A shriek, a wild half-laugh rang out, and Convict 35 fell to the ground in a dead faint.

But joy does not kill!

(The conclusion of this story appears in next Tuesday's issue. The first instalment of our powerful new serial "A FOE IN THE FAMILY," also appears next week. You must not miss it.)

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Discovery of a Rational Treatment for Deafness.

A glance through the medical literature of the last twenty years reveals to the close observer a remarkable diversity of opinion among aurists as to what constitutes the proper method of treatment for deafness and diseases of the ear. Some authorities recommend, in obstinate cases, cutting away the drumhead of the ear, other aural surgeons are emphatic in saying that the results obtained are too uncertain to justify such severe measures. Another class of medical men base the treatment of deafness almost entirely on the application of medicated vapours forced through the nose into the middle ear by way of the Eustachian tube, but it is strange to find these same aurists acknowledging, in their writings on this subject, that it is doubtful if medication applied in this way can reach the seat of the disease which causes defective hearing.

In the midst of all this doubt and uncertainty there is, fortunately, the record of the discovery of a rational method. The Drouet Treatment, of treating deafness and ear diseases, which depends upon the scientific fact that the skin possesses the property of absorbing certain drugs applied to its surface and of conveying them by means of its underlying blood vessels to the adjacent diseased parts. In this method a plaster containing the necessary medicines is applied behind the ear and the medication, being absorbed by the skin, penetrates to the middle ear and inner ear, where the curative effects are exerted. To this simple procedure is subjoined, according to the merits of each individual case, such antiseptic medication for the ear, nose, or throat as may be needed.

Like all innovations, this treatment has received the severest criticisms, but, notwithstanding such opposition, ten years' test of the method has given results so emphatically successful that the usual medical opinions on the curability of deafness have been completely overthrown. In the long list of cases which, after being pronounced incurable by aural surgeons, have been reported cured by the Drouet Treatment, there are so many instances of recovery of hearing in advanced age, after fifteen, twenty, or even thirty years of defective hearing, and in the face of the worst forms of ear disease, that the victim of deafness finds renewed hopes.

Those who wish to thoroughly understand the Drouet method of Treatment will find a full description in a Special number of the "Journal for the Deaf," the Editor of this paper having written a series of popular articles on this subject, with which are embodied the details of a large number of cured cases. With this Special number is published a supplement containing a record of upwards of forty cases of the deafness and diseases of the ear, nose, and throat cured by the Drouet Treatment during the past month. To obtain a free copy of the "Journal" and Supplement it is only necessary to address the Editor, 72, Regent's Park Road, London, N.W. With the "Journal" will also be enclosed a Report Form, which will enable anyone to obtain free advice and instructions for applying the Drouet Treatment at home.

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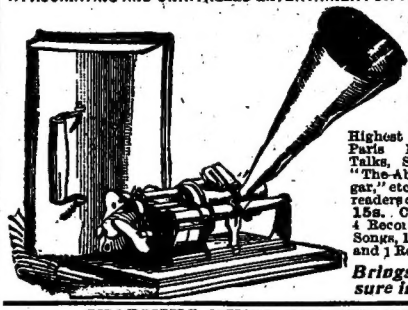

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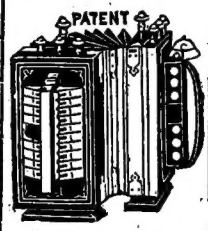

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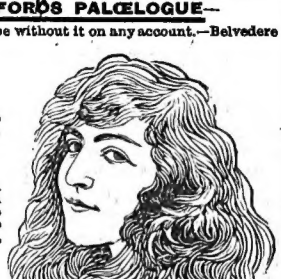

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Lawrie's Difficulties.

"Lawrie" is deeply in love with a girl who is engaged to another man. This man, is, in "Lawrie's" judgment, quite unfitted to be her husband, and the whole affair is, in fact, simply an infatuation which he thinks will, in the course of time evaporate. Meanwhile, how should "Lawrie" act so as to win the girl from the probabilities of an unhappy marriage and get her to return his own affection?

* * * *

"Lawrie" must not, of course, interfere in the attachment of the girl. She herself may see qualities for admiration in the other man which would very naturally escape the jealous eye of "Lawrie." Let him be as attentive and nice to her as his position as an outsider will permit, and if in time the affair does come to an end as he suspects, he should be ready to assume the *rôle* of suitor on the grounds of sincere friendship, to which a girl crossed in a passionate love would probably be only too ready to turn for refuge.

❦❦❦

Wife or Friends?

"Josh" is married, and some old college friends have been recently staying at his house. In order to be agreeable with them, he has spent several nights sitting up with them playing cards, while his wife has been downstairs alone. On rejoining her after the friends have gone to bed, he has found her very disconsolate at being left alone. Do I not think it is unreasonable for her to expect him to leave his friends to entertain themselves?

* * * *

I do not think much of the manners of men who, staying in the house of a married man, do not conform with their duties to their hostess. Neither do I respect very much the wisdom of "Josh" in giving his friends first place, and his affectionate wife second. He would do well not to repeat such conduct, as I have known of cases, when a wife, exasperated by neglect on the part of her husband, has left him altogether to go and live with relatives. You know the proverb about the fury of the "woman scorned."

❦❦❦

A Case for Patience.

"G. H." has a sweetheart who continually suffers from the "blues." Often when he meets her she is silent and capricious, grumbles at the smallest thing, and gets quarrelsome and uncommunicative. "G. H." has grown rather tired of it. Do I recommend him to grow cool to her in order to bring her to proper behaviour when with him, or how should he act?

* * * *

The girl is probably more a subject for a doctor than anyone else. She is very likely in a bad state of health, and this is one of the effects on her. Besides that, perhaps you have overstepped the mark in your devotion to her, and she acts in this way simply to annoy you, knowing that you would never be harsh with her. I should take no notice of her moods, save to correct her when she shows herself to be quite unreasonable. There is no known cure for a woman's caprices.

An Outcast of Love.

"What am I to do?" writes "Ada E." "I took rather a fancy to a man some time ago, and we corresponded and sometimes met. I thought he was well to do from his manner and dress. I have since learnt that he is not on speaking terms with his family, and has no occupation or means besides a small allowance. Ought I to encourage him further, or even to continue the acquaintance, seeing that he does not appear to be going the way to work to get on in the world?"

* * * *

Certainly you should not even consider any attentions from him, save that it is understood between you that they have no serious meaning. There is no harm in your knowing this or any other young man, but you should clearly infer that you know your own mind as to the kind of man you wish to marry, and let him know that unless he has some serious plan for making his way in life, you could not even think of an engagement. I am assuming that you are not head-over-ears in love with him, from the judicial way in which you write.

❦❦❦

What is a "Good Time"?

"Ettie" some time ago met an Edinburgh man at a dance in London. They enjoyed a mild flirtation, which however was not serious. One of his last words were: "If you ever come to Edinburgh, I hope to see you and give you a good time." "Ettie" is, as a matter of fact, going on a visit to Scotland next month, and would like to know if it would be proper etiquette for her to let this gentleman know. If so, how could he "give her a good time" and yet keep within the bounds of conventionality?

* * * *

I assume "Ettie" is going to stay with friends in Scotland. When there, she might mention that she has a gentleman friend in Edinburgh. The next thing would be to ascertain whether her friends would like him to call and be introduced, in which case "Ettie" should drop him a line saying that her hostess would be very pleased to see Mr. —— to tea, say, on a certain date. What happens after this should be perfectly regular. If the gentleman should carry out his promise to "give her a good time" by securing seats for theatres, or arranging an excursion, "Ettie" could avail herself of his invitation. All must depend on the extent to which "Ettie" thinks the man is serious, and how far she values his continued acquaintance.

❦❦❦

The Interesting Friend.

"J. W. C." is very fond of a young lady, and has taken several walks with her. On some occasions when he has met her, she has had a lady friend with her who has not seemed to like the idea of her leaving to go with "J. W. C.," and has shown this in her manner. The result has been that the former young lady has at times declined to walk with "J. W. C." for fear of offending her friend. Should she consider her friend's feelings before those of my correspondent?"

* * * *

Certainly the young lady has a perfect right to consider her friend's feelings. It shows a very nice characteristic on her part that she should be so considerate towards a friend as to forego her own pleasure rather than slight her in any way. If you are engaged to the girl, and she is fond of you, naturally she will lose no opportunity of trying to get with you alone. If she does not take the proper steps to do so, she cannot be particularly fond of you. It is her affair as to whether or not she neglects her girl friend for you. There is no course for you to take except to assume that if she returns your love she will not allow anyone to stand in the way, and therefore to leave the question of disposing of her friend to her own devices.

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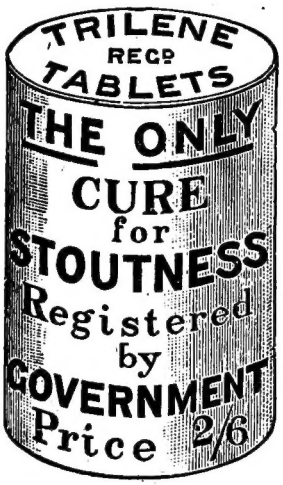

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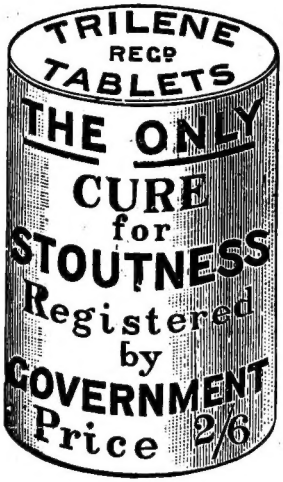

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"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 3lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Bisehoim Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18 b. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1¼ stones."

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Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a wonderful good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brimley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER, of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

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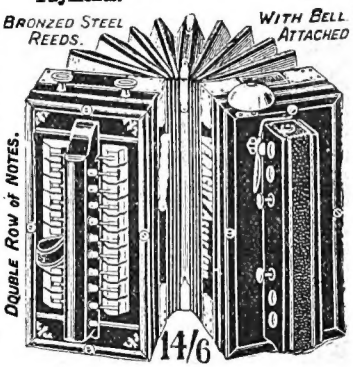

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